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MUSICAL REMINISCENCES.

MUSICAL

REMINISCENCES

OF

AN OLD AMATEUR

CHIEFLY RESPECTING THE

ITALIAN OPERA IN ENGLAND

FOR FIFTY YEARS,

FROM

1773 TO 1823,

81270

THE SECOND EDITION,

CONTINUED TO THE PRESENT TIME.

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INTRODUCTION.

The following pages owe their origin to a correspondence on the subject of music, and on the changes it has undergone of late years; in which were necessarily introduced some details respecting the former state of our opera, and criticisms on the most celebrated performers who brought it to its highest perfection. These having raised some curiosity in the friend to whom they were addressed, I was induced to put them together in a more regular form, and to write as correct an account as my memory, naturally very retentive, could enable me to do of all the musical events that have occurred during the long period to

which my remembrance extends, and particularly of the Italian Opera in this country. I accordingly began these Reminiscences, thereby yielding a good deal to my own inclination, as the recollections I have been obliged to call back have afforded me no small gratification, having been passionately fond of music while music was really good, and having lived in what I consider as one of its most flourishing periods. So great a change has taken place within a few years, that I can no longer receive from it any pleasure approaching to that which I used to experience. The remembrance of the past is therefore infinitely more agreeable than the enjoyment of the present, and I derive the highest gratification music can yet afford me from hearing again, or barely recalling to mind what formerly gave me such unqualified delight. This pleasure can no longer be expected from professors, at least the Italian; but

many English amateurs retain like myself the love for the good old style, and for the compositions of those excellent masters which modern caprice has thrown aside as obsolete, but which must ever be considered by real judges as superior to the fantastical and trifling frippery of the modern school. My remarks will no doubt appear very *old-fashioned*, and it is natural they should be so; but if it were possible to suppose they should be read fifty years hence, I think it very probable they would then be considered to be founded in truth and justice; as the present fanciful style seems to be such as must speedily pass away, and be replaced by one more true to nature, more resembling at least, if not quite reverting to, that simpler kind which must invariably please all who are susceptible of feeling the genuine, unsophisticated expression of really fine music. But I am anticipating what, if it is said at all, will find a more proper place hereafter.

My principal object in the following pages has been to give a regular account of the Opera from the earliest days in which I can remember it, which I am enabled to do for so long a space as fifty years: for I was carried thither even in my childhood; as I advanced in years my taste for it encreased, and for the best portion of my life I was one of its most constant frequenters. For the last twenty years I have ceased to take the same interest in it, and have been but an occasional, even a rare visitor of the theatre: for several seasons I scarcely entered its doors. As the good singers disappeared, and remained unreplaced, as the style of the compositions changed, and as their execution deviated more and more from what I had been accustomed to in the *golden age* of the opera, my curiosity diminished with my pleasure, and though both have latterly been occasionally revived, yet I never expect to hear again what I have done, or any new music, or new singers that will

make me amends for those which are gone. Tastes are always various, generally fluctuating: mine, which was formed nearly half a century ago, has not wavered in the slightest degree down to the present moment. According to that taste, whether it may be esteemed good or bad, I have ventured to give my opinion on music and performers past and present, have detailed all I remember, and the first impressions I received. Those are always the most lasting, and not unfrequently the most correct; at least, on mature consideration, I still think them so.

The epistolary style, which has been in a great degree preserved throughout these Reminiscences, will account for the diffuse, digressive, and irregular manner in which they are written, and for the introduction of some anecdotes not strictly belonging to the subject, which occurred to my recollection as I proceeded; as well as for the egotism which may

appear to prevail, and for the relation of some occurrences purely personal. If these pages should ever be read, it is hoped that the curious on musical subjects may find some information which may be not uninteresting; and (as I have more confidence in my memory than my judgment) those who differ with me in my opinions and criticisms may at least place reliance on the accuracy of the facts.

MUSICAL

REMINISCENCES.

SECTION I.

1773—1778.

Earliest recollections—Millico—Rauzzini—Gabrielli—Pozzi—Miss Davies—Savoi—Galli—Roncaglia—Danzi—Aguijari—Giorgi.

The first opera which I have any the slightest recollection of having seen, was that of Artaserse, in the year 1773, at which time Millico was the first man.* Being then quite a child, I could not in the least judge of his

* It may be convenient to mention here, that the serious opera uniformly consisted of the following persons:—The primo uomo, soprano, prima donna, and tenor; the secondo uomo, soprano, seconda donna, and ultima parte, bass. It had rarely more characters, and chorusses were seldom introduced.

performance; but his face and figure were too remarkable not to make an impression never to be entirely effaced, being of a singularly dark complexion, ill made, and uncommonly plain in features. Of his merits I can say nothing but that his reputation was still high in Italy when I was in that country many years afterwards. He published here a collection of canzonettas, which are of a most pleasing and graceful style. These I have frequently heard executed by Lady Clarges, who had been his scholar, and was one of the best amateur performers I ever knew. She sung with all the science of a professor, and with a taste the most polished and refined. If she had adopted that of her master, there can be no doubt of his having been an excellent singer. The first woman in that year was, I believe, Grassi, afterwards married to the composer Bach: she was succeeded by Girelli.

I have a much more distinct recollection of Rauzzini, who succeeded Millico in the season of 1774 and 1775, and remained at the Opera for three years, having had frequent oppor-

tunities of hearing him after he had left the stage. When he first sung at the Opera, he was young and handsome, had an agreeable countenance, and was an animated actor. His voice was uncommonly sweet, and his taste good, but his powers were rather limited. He was a good musician, and composed several Operas performed here subsequently. One only was brought out by himself, Piramo e Tisbe, in which he acted with a German woman named Schindlerin, a weak and moderate performer. I heard her mentioned with praise long afterwards in Germany as one of the best singers of their national stage, but never saw her perform there. The other Operas in which these two singers appeared together, were Armida and Montezuma, composed by Sacchini.

In the second year of Rauzzini's engagement, Schindlerin was succeeded by the celebrated Catterina Gabrielli, esteemed the best prima donna of her time, and famous alike for her talents and for her caprice. The latter was so great that she could never be depended upon, and it was thought she never gave

herself the trouble to exert her great powers to the utmost before an English audience. Certain it is, that, whether from that, or some other cause, she was less enthusiastically admired here than she had been in various parts of the continent, and her success was so moderate that she staid only for one season. I can remember seeing her once in the opera of Didone, but can say nothing of her performance, all I can recollect of it being the care with which she tucked up her great hoop as she sidled into the flames of Carthage. Another opera she acted here was La Vestale, which I likewise saw performed, but on that night Catterina *chose* to be indisposed, and to make her sister Francesca take her part: the latter was a miserable performer whom she carried every where to act as the seconda donna, and occasionally as her *double*.

On her departure, a young singer named Pozzi came to supply her place: but though handsome, and possessing a most brilliant clear voice (bel metallo di voce), she was at that time so unformed, both as a singer and an actress, that she totally failed in her first

opera; and Miss Cecilia Davies, who had sung here before with Millico, was sent for to resume her station for the remainder of the season. After this degradation, Pozzi continued for some years in this country as the second woman, and in that line was superior to every other. On her return to Italy, she improved rapidly, and soon became one of the first singers in that country, as I shall have occasion to notice hereafter. Miss Davies was the first Englishwoman who had yet sustained the part of prima donna, and in that situation was second only to Gabrielli, whom she even rivalled in neatness of execution.* Her elder sister played on the harmonica, an improved kind of musical glasses, and in the last edition of Metastasio's works is a cantata written for the one sister to sing, the other to accompany on that instrument. When I was in Italy, I found Miss Davies at Florence, unengaged, and poor. The English there subscribed for a private concert, at which both sisters performed. She afterwards came

* In Italy she was known by the name of L'Inglesina.

again to England, but being old and passée, did not succeed in obtaining an engagement.

After Rauzzini quitted the opera, he still continued in, or returned shortly to, England, and ultimately, settled at Bath, where for many years he conducted the concerts, singing himself as long as his voice permitted, and was in great reputation as a master, much respected and patronized to his death, which happened only a few years ago.

During part of the time of which I have been speaking, the second man was Savoi, whose voice was of so singularly beautiful and peculiar a tone, that when I was in Italy, going by chance into a church at Sienna during high mass, I was struck with sounds so sweet, yet, as I thought, not new to my ear, that I could not help enquiring the name of the performer, and found they proceeded from Savoi.

The part of second man was frequently filled also by Signora Galli, her figure being rather large and masculine, and her voice a contralto. She had been a principal singer in Handel's oratorios, when conducted by him-

self. She is however only mentioned here, on account of some subsequent circumstances of her life. She became the companion of the celebrated Miss Ray, and was with her when she was assassinated by Hackman as she was coming out of Covent-garden theatre. That unhappy young man, instigated by jealousy, though he knew his love to be perfectly hopeless, shot her with a pistol as she was entering her carriage, and then fired a second at himself. Her wound was instantly mortal, but his own was slight, and he was tried and executed for the murder. Galli afterwards fell into extreme poverty, and at the age of above seventy, was induced to come forward to sing again at the oratorios. I had the curiosity to go, and heard her sing, "He was despised and rejected of men" in the Messiah. Of course her voice was cracked and trembling, but it was easy to see her school was good; and it was pleasing to observe the kindness with which she was received, and listened to; and to mark the animation and delight with which she seemed to hear again the music in which she had formerly been a

distinguished performer. The poor old woman had been in the habit of coming to me annually for a trifling present; and she told me on that occasion that nothing but the severest distress should have compelled her so to expose herself, which after all did not answer its end, as she was not paid according to her agreement. She died shortly after.

To return from this digression. At the close of Rauzzini's engagement, his place was filled by Roncaglia, his inferior in every respect. His figure was good, and he was far from ill-looking; his voice sweet, and his style easy and *grazioso*: but he was languid, feeble, and insipid, and withal extremely affected. Yet he gave so much pleasure on his first appearance in Sacchini's opera of Creso, that as he was under engagement to return to Italy the next year, he was hastily re-engaged for the next season but one, before it was known how his immediate successor would be liked. With him came Danzi as first woman. Though her name was Italian, she was a German, and had never been in Italy. She was young, well-looking, had a voice of

uncommon clearness and compass, capable of the most astonishing execution, and was an excellent musician. Yet her performance was unsatisfactory, being too much *alla Tedescha*, and more like that of an instrument than of a human voice. She soon after married Monsieur Lebrun, an eminent player on the hautbois, which confirmed her in the bravura style, as she was in the habit of singing songs with an obligato accompaniment for that instrument, in which the difficulties performed by both were quite astonishing, each seeming to vie with the other which could go highest, and execute the most rapid divisions. After performing in Erifile, also by Sacchini, and other operas, she, as well as Roncaglia, left England after one season, but like him was re-engaged for the next ensuing.

About this time another singer in the *wonderful* line was performing in the concerts at the Pantheon, by name Aguijari. I must have heard her in private, but can say only from report that her voice was one of the finest and most powerful ever heard, and her execution almost miraculous. She never per-

formed at the opera in this country, where she staid but a short time, and was succeeded at the Pantheon by a young, and then very inferior singer, with no recommendation but a very beautiful voice, promising future excellence. This was Giorgi, by which name she was little known, but of whom I shall have much, very much, to say hereafter under that of Banti.

And here ends my *dark* age in operatical history: henceforth I shall speak with confidence from the clearest and most distinct recollection.

SECTION II.

1778—1783.

Pacchierotti—Bernasconi—Return of Roncaglia and Madame Danzi Lebrun—Ansani—Maccherini—Return of Pacchierotti—Prudom—Comic Opera—Sestini—Todi—Allegranti—Viganoni.

From the period on which I am now entering I date the commencement of my decided taste for music, which (young as I was), I now began to love and to feel: for, in the season of 1778 and 1779, arrived Pacchierotti, decidedly, in my opinion, the most perfect singer it ever fell to my lot to hear. I must enter into some detail respecting him.

Pacchierotti's voice was an extensive soprano, full and sweet in the highest degree; his powers of execution were great, but he had far too good taste and too good sense to make a display of them where it would have been misapplied, confining it to one bravura song

(aria di agilità) in each opera, conscious that the chief delight of singing, and his own supreme excellence, lay in touching expression, and exquisite pathos. Yet he was so thorough a musician that nothing came amiss to him; every style was to him equally easy, and he could sing, at first sight, all songs of the most opposite characters, not merely with the facility and correctness which a complete knowledge of music must give, but entering at once into the views of the composer, and giving them all the spirit and expression he had designed. Such was his genius in his embellishments and cadences, that their variety was inexhaustible. He could not sing a song twice in exactly the same way; yet never did he introduce an ornament that was not judicious, and appropriate to the composition. His shake, then considered as an indispensible requisite, without which no one could be esteemed a perfect singer, was the very best that could be heard in every form in which that grace can be executed: whether taken from above or below, between whole or semi-tones, fast or slow, it was

always open, equal, and distinct, giving the greatest brilliancy to his cadences, and often introduced into his passages with the happiest effect.* As an actor, with many disadvantages of person, for he was tall and awkward in his figure, and his features were plain, he was nevertheless forcible and impressive: for he felt warmly, had excellent judgment, and was an enthusiast in his profession. His recitative was inimitably fine, so that even those who did not understand the language could not fail to comprehend, from his countenance, voice, and action, every sentiment he expressed. As a concert singer, and particularly in private society, he shone almost more than on the stage; for he sung with greater spirit in a small circle of friends, and was more gratified with their applause, than in a public concert room, or crowded theatre. I was in the habit of so hearing him most frequently, and having been intimately

* This, perhaps the most beautiful of graces, is now entirely lost in Italy: not one singer of that country so much as attempts it. From the English it still is heard, and often in great perfection.

acquainted with him for many years, am enabled to speak thus minutely of his performance. On such occasions he would give way to his fancy, and seem almost inspired; and I have often seen his auditors, even those the least musical, moved to tears while he was singing. Possessing a very large collection of music, he could give an infinite variety of songs by every master of reputation. I have more than once heard him sing a cantata of Haydn's, called Arianna a Naxos, composed for a single voice with only a pianoforte accompaniment, and that was played by Haydn himself: it is needless to say the performance was perfect. To this detail of his merits and peculiar qualities as a singer, I must add that he was a worthy, good man, modest and diffident even to a fault; for it was to an excess that at times checked his exertions, and made him dissatisfied with himself, when he had given the greatest delight to his hearers. He was unpresuming in his manners, grateful and attached to all his numerous friends aud patrons.

The first appearance of Pacchierotti in this

country was in Demofoonte (a pasticcio), in which he sung four songs in different styles, by as many different composers, which shewed his versatile talents to the greatest advantage, and at once established his reputation.

The first woman, who made also her first appearance in this opera, was Bernasconi, a good musician, and correct skilful singer; but her voice was not powerful, and she was past her prime: she was a good actress, with but an indifferent figure. The tenor, a German named Ademberger, had a disagreeable nasal voice, but sung with considerable science. In this opera too a young man with a good bass voice made his début as *ultima parte*. This was Rovedino, who passed the greatest part of his life in this country, and was employed at the opera till he quitted the stage, proving, if not a first rate, at least a useful performer, both in serious and comic operas. He died at an advanced age only a year or two ago, leaving several children, all musical. One of his daughters, who is dead, was for a long time second woman: she married Weichsell, the brother of Mrs. Billington, and celebrated

violin player, who at a subsequent period led the orchestra for many years.

In consequence of the re-engagement of the singers of the former season, Pacchierotti went away at the end of this, in the summer of 1779, but Bernasconi remained for one more, condescending (for then it was so esteemed), to take the part of first woman in the comic opera, which she perfomed admirably: Danzi, now become Madame Lebrun, being again the prima donna for the serious, and Roncaglia resuming his place, but with far different success from the first time. Coming after Pacchierotti, his insipidity and poverty were more apparent, and not so well endured. To add to his *disgrazia*, Ansani, a new tenor, then made his first appearance and quite eclipsed the *primo uomo*. This performer had a finely toned, full, and commanding voice, was a spirited actor, and in the first opera, called Ricimero, sustained the most prominent and important part. But he was unfortunately of a most peevish, quarrelsome temper; Roncaglia was saucy and conceited, and neither could brook the superiority claimed by the

other. Their mutual jealousy, and the importance assumed by the tenor soon produced an irreconcileable breach, Ansani threw up his engagement, and the season went on heavily to its close for want of him. When it was ended Roncaglia went away.

The next season was far more brilliant, indeed one of the best I ever remember. Pacchierotti returned, Madame Lebrun retained, Ansani restored to his situation (willingly yielding the *pas* to Pacchierotti's undisputed pre-eminence), Pozzi second woman, and Manzoletto, a very tolerable singer, for second man, formed altogether a capital company, and its success was proportionable to its merit.

The three or four following seasons were not equally successful. Pacchierotti indeed remained, but Madame Lebrun went away, nor was her place ever well filled during the rest of his stay, which was prolonged to the end of the season of 1784. Her first successor was Maccherini, whose reputation was high in Italy. She was the wife of Ansani, but never couple was less harmonious; her temper was

full as bad as his, and they never could agree either on or off the stage. She not arriving in time for the beginning of the season, Prudom, a young singer engaged in lieu of Pozzi for second woman, was put temporarily into her place. At length the long expected and much praised Maccherini made her appearance, and never was expectation more completely disappointed. Her voice was a mere thread, scarcely audible in the orchestra, and her performance in every respect (like her countenance) miserable in the extreme: so that she was laid aside for ever after a few nights, and a fine opera called Giunio Bruto, in which her husband and Pacchierotti played the parts of the father and son, necessarily abandoned. Her failure was, of course, attributed to the climate, which it was said had destroyed her voice; but I heard her a few years after in Italy, when she had not in the least recovered it, so that it may be presumed it never had existed. Prudom again took the first place for the remainder of the season, and gave great pleasure by the sweetness of her voice, and her chaste good style of singing.

She was too young to be a finished or scientific performer, but had she lived might have become one; unfortunately she died here at a very early age. For a time she sung at Drury Lane theatre, where she first appeared in the Lord of the Manor. I mention this only to record the singular circumstance that in this opera the celebrated Miss Farren, who continues to be as much respected and beloved in the high rank she now holds in society as she was admired when at the height of her professional excellence, performed a secondary part both as actress and singer. The latter character she soon abandoned, but many still remember with delight, and all must have heard of, her unrivalled talents as the first of comic actresses. When she left the stage, genteel comedy became extinct.

To return to the opera. The next attempt to procure a first woman proved almost as unsuccessful as the last, Morigi (daughter of the buffo of that name then in England), being nearly as feeble as her predecessor. Another was tried in her stead, but all to no purpose.

A third, named Lusini, had little better success in the following season, but her I never heard, having gone abroad for two years in the summer of 1783.

The operas most admired during the seasons I have been speaking of, were the Rinaldo of Sacchini, L'Olimpiade, and Ezio, pastriccios, Quinto Fabio by Bertoni, master of the Conservatorio dei Mendicanti at Venice, l'Eroe Cinese by Rauzzini, and others which do not occur to me, or which I never heard.

Most of these were sustained by Pacchierotti's talents alone, for, as has been shewn, he was generally miserably supported. Yet the managers deserved not all the blame that was thrown upon them, and were less in fault than unfortunate in the failure of so many prima donnas. The fact was, that there was at that time no very great female singer in Italy, those of former celebrity being on the decline, and only two young promising performers rising to eminence in their stead. These were Pozzi, who returned no more to England, and Giorgi Banti, as she was called

after her marriage, whose name began to be talked of, and who shortly after became so justly famous.

I must now, before I proceed farther, return back to my earliest recollections in order to give some account of the comic opera, which hitherto I have not noticed, that the more important department might not be interrupted.*

The earliest singer I remember in that line was Sestini, who at her first coming over was handsome, sprightly, and a good actress, if great exuberance of gesticulation, activity of motion, and affected Italian *smorfie* could make her one; but her voice was gritty and sharp (something like singing through a comb), and she was nothing of a singer, except for lively comic airs. Yet she was much liked at first, and long a favourite with the mass of the public, though not with the *connoisseurs*. She

* The company for the comic opera consisted of the primo buffo, tenor, prima buffa, buffo caricato, bass, seconda buffa, and ultima parte, bass. There were also the uomo serio, and donna seria, generally the second man and woman of the serious opera.

was first woman for many years, then, in the decline of her voice, became second; sung at intervals at Covent Garden, and the little theatre in the Haymarket; in short condescended to every thing to keep herself from starving, and constantly remaining in England, died here at last in great poverty.

The first buffo with Sestini was Trebbi, a moderately good performer, who occasionally was employed also as tenor in the serious opera, when others failed, as on the defection of Ansani, and the death of a young man who sung in the time of Rauzzini.

One of the most favourite operas in which these singers performed was, La buona figliuola of Piccini, the music of which was charming, but it had been so much better sung before by Guadagni and Lovattini, that nothing was heard but lamentations for their loss, and comparisons to the disadvantage of the present performers. Lovattini was celebrated for the most beautiful of tenor voices, and for his excellent acting. I never heard him, though he did not, I believe, leave England till the end of the season of 1774, but I saw in the pave-

ment of a church at Bologna, a small square stone, inscribed with the three words, "Qui giace Lovattini." Guadagni was sister of a singer, of whom I shall have occasion to speak hereafter.

The buona figliuola was revived very many years after by Catalani; but the taste was so changed, that the old music, rather quaint and odd, it must be confessed, to modern ears, was no longer relished, and did not succeed. It was but indifferently sung, even by that great singer herself.

Paesiello's Frascatana, another opera of that time, has always had better success: the music is *de tout age*, and has given great pleasure in many subsequent revivals by Storace, Catalani, and other singers; and it ever must do so to all (though small is now the number), who can yet admire simple and natural melody. Such was the estimation in which this opera was held in Italy, that I have been told it was always brought forward on the failure of any new one, as sure to appease a dissatisfied audience.

When the public began to tire of Sestini,

Todi was engaged in her stead, but failed to please here, though admired on the continent, and was kept only one season. A tenor named Jermoli was equally unsuccessful. Bernasconi then became first buffa for one year, with Trebbi, and Pozzi was occasionally put into first parts, particularly in Grétry's Zémire et Azor (to Italian words). with Manzoletto as first man, and Rovedino for the bass.

These moderate performers were at length succeeded by one who was enthusiastically admired in her first opera, the Viaggiatori felici of Anfossi, by name Allegranti. She had a voice which, though thin, was extremely sweet, of extraordinary compass upwards, and so flexible that she executed with ease very rapid divisions, and consequently indulged in a flowery style of singing, which had the merit of considerable novelty: she was also a good actress. But it was soon found that there was a great sameness in her manner and embellishments, and with more than our usual fickleness, she was less liked in every subsequent opera, and so disregarded by the end of the second season that she went

away. With her had come Viganoni, who at that time made little effect, and also left the country; but after an absence of some years he returned, and for many more was first tenor both in the serious and comic opera. His voice was never very strong, nor of a good tone, but he was an excellent musician, had good taste, and must on the whole be considered as a singer of great merit.

These performers were replaced by others very much their inferiors, but I never heard them, as they remained only one season, during which I was abroad. The woman's name was Dorta; the tenor of no reputation; but Tasca, a bass, was good enough to be retained for a year or two more.

I must here break of my account of the opera at home, and before I resume it, will relate the principal musical occurrences of my tour on the continent.

SECTION III.

1783—1785.

Musical occurrences in a tour through Germany, France, and Italy—Return to England—Short notice of the Opera—Commemoration of Handel in Westminster Abbey.

The first place at which I made any stay was Spa, where the national and theatrical music could afford no pleasure, but it so chanced that Pacchierotti came thither also at the same time to pass a few weeks during the opera recess, and I had the gratification of hearing him sing in private almost daily, which was always a delightful treat. He gave one public concert, but it was not so well attended, nor himself as much admired as he deserved to be, which was hardly to be wondered at considering that a great part of the audience was French, who then could like no music but their own.

Proceeding into Germany, the first Italian

opera I heard was at Brunswick, where there was a company of second-rate performers, of whom, however, the first man and woman were very tolerable. During my short stay they acted a serious and a comic opera: the former was the Giulio Sabino of Sarti, which I shall have to notice more particularly.

At Berlin there was a company of a superior description, in the constant pay of the king, but no operas were ever acted except in the carnival. The first woman of it was Todi, whom we had so lightly esteemed; but who was there spoken of with rapture. I had no opportunity of hearing her, but had that of seeing the first man, Concialini, next to whom I found myself seated at a table d'hôte. He too was spoken of with great praise.

At Dresden there was a very good comic opera, headed by Allegranti, who remained a permanent favourite there as long as the court could afford to keep up that spectacle: and happy would it have been for her if she had never been obliged to leave that place; for, many years after, she in an evil hour came again to England, and re-appeared in

Cimarosa's Matrimonio segreto. Never was there a more pitiable attempt: she had scarcely a thread of voice remaining, nor the power to sing a note in tune: her figure and acting were equally altered for the worse, and after a few nights she was obliged to retire, and quit the stage altogether. Of course again our climate, not her age, was blamed for the total loss of her voice; but she was at least remembered to have had one, and was looked upon only with compassion.

In passing through Prague, I heard an opera performed by singers almost below mediocrity, but the opera itself was so delightful that it could not but give pleasure. It was Le Nozze di Dorina, or, Frà due litiganti il terzo gode, the chef-d'œuvre of Sarti in the buffo, as Giulio Sabino is in the serious style. I often heard both afterwards executed in a very different manner.

At Vienna, where I passed all the winter, there was no serious opera, but a most excellent set of singers for the comic, consisting of Ademberger and Viganoni, who had been in England, Benucci and Kelly, who afterwards

came thither, Mandini, an excellent buffo, and Storace first woman, with several very good both male and female performers for the secondary parts. Storace in a few years after returned to this her native country, which she never left again. She will be frequently named, and her merits detailed, at a future period. I also there heard once more Bernasconi, who had settled in that city, not engaged at the opera; but she gave a few representations, at a theatre not usually open, of the Alceste and Ifigenia in Tauride of Gluck, both of which were subsequently performed at our opera, and of a comic opera called La Contadina in Corte, which she had acted here with success.

After spending the winter at Vienna, I went in the spring of 1784 to Venice for the fair of the Ascension, on which occasion there is always an opera, but this year it was very moderate. Porri, the first man, was a very indifferent singer, and a German named Fischer and his wife, who were the tenor and first woman, not much better. The opera performed was Ademira, by Tarchi.

But if the theatrical performance disappointed me, I received very high gratification from attending those of the Conservatorio dei Mendicanti, where, on the evenings of Sundays and holy-days, oratorios were performed in the chapel. Not only all the vocal, but the instrumental parts were executed by women, concealed from view in a grated gallery. Their performance was perfect, and some of the voices exquisitely beautiful, in every pitch of which the female organ is capable. The oratorio I heard was that of Sampson, in Latin, the composition of Bertoni, by whose favour a party of English was admitted into the interior to a morning concert, when we had not only the pleasure of hearing a delightful selection of music, but the almost incredible sight of an entire orchestra of female performers. There were at this time four of these musical academies at Venice, of which that of the Mendicanti was esteemed the best, on account of the excellence of its master. The young women educated in them rarely went upon the stage when they quitted the establishment, but I have met with more than

one female player on the violin who had received their instruction in them.

I must here add that in other towns of Italy, particularly at Florence and Rome, I derived great pleasure from the performance of similar sacred dramas in the chapels of the Padri del Oratorio.

In passing through Padua, I went to a grand mass in the church of St. Antonio, when, it being Whit-Sunday, and of course a festival, I had the good fortune to hear a *motetto*, or anthem, sung by Guadagni, of whom I had heard very much, as he had for a long time been a great favorite in England, which he left in the year 1771. When he sung as first man at our opera he was uncommonly handsome, and a remarkably good actor; Garrick himself having taken pains to instruct him. His voice was then a soprano of the finest description, and his performance, particularly of Orfeo, was described as having been delightful. He was now advanced in years, and sung as contralto: his voice was still full and well toned, and his style appeared to me excellent. He belonged to the choir of the

church in which I heard him, where alone he ever sung, and that only on a few particular occasions. As he retained a great partiality for England, and had been much noticed by my family, he no sooner heard I was in the town than he came to call upon me, and insisted on my taking coffee at his house, where he entertained me, not with singing, which I should have liked much better, but with exhibiting fantoccini on a little stage, in which he took great delight. I learnt lately that he died one year after I saw him.

Quitting Italy for the summer, I went to Paris, where, as there was at that time no Italian opera, music could give me little pleasure. Though some of the lighter French pieces are pretty, the *grand opera* to all ears but French can give only *pain*. The principal singer Madlle. Saint-Huberti was absent, but I found her at Lyons, where I saw her perform several times. She was a fine actress, and in her singing a little less violent and extravagant than the generality of French singers, but still too much in their style. I heard her once more in private many years

after in England, when she was become Comtesse d'Entragues, and an émigrée. Her voice then, moderated to the room, and probably weakened by age, was far from disagreeable, and she was a very good musician. Her shocking end is well known. She and the Count her husband were both assassinated at their villa at Barnes by an Italian servant, who immediately destroyed himself, being prompted to the deed by malice, not by the desire of plunder. She left one son, now Comte d'Entragues.

During my stay at Paris, one *Concert spirituel* took place in the old theatre of the Tuilleries, at which, for the first time, I heard Madame Mara, just then returned from England, where she had performed at the commemoration of Handel in Westminster Abbey. Amongst other things, she sung "I know that my Redeemer liveth," which was announced in the bills as being, musique de Handel, paroles de *Milton*. The French had not the taste to like it. A full account will be given hereafter of that singer.

I re-entered Italy in the following autumn,

and landing at Leghorn from Genoa, found an opera in that town, but it was very indifferent, with Porri for first man, Scovelli, a bad tenor whom I had left in England, and a woman not worth remembering.

At Florence, the opera was no better, nor can I recollect the name of any one of the singers except Bruni, the first man, who afterwards sung for one season in England.

In the beginning of the carnival at Rome, four or five theatres were opened, of which two were for serious operas. There I found both Roncaglia and Ansani, but now they could not clash, being at different theatres; the former at that of Argentina, with an excellent tenor, Mombelli, the latter at the Aliberti with Porri for first man. The opera performed at the last was Giunio Bruto, which came to so untimely an end here. At that time no female was permitted to appear on the stage at Rome in any character whatever, operatic, dramatic, or dancing. In the singing parts, therefore, sopranos were employed as their substitutes, generally the youngest, and consequently not the best, being chosen for

their looks rather than their ability. At one of the smaller theatres, however, the part of first woman in an intermezzo, performed between the acts of a comedy, was filled by a very promising young singer, named Martini, who became in time one of the best first men, and from his birth-place, Sienna, was known by the name of Senesino: he never came to this country.

At length I had the good fortune to hear a thorough good opera at Naples, where the principal singers at the theatre of San Carlo were Pozzi, first woman, Rubinelli, first man, and David, tenor, all excellent in their respective lines; but I shall not enter on their merits here, as I shall have a future opportunity of doing so. The opera was Antigono, composed by Paesiello. At the theatre dei Fiorentini, where comic operas were acted, the first woman was Coltellini, most justly the favorite of the Neapolitans; for she was very pretty, a most excellent actress, and though no great singer, so adapted herself to their taste by singing popular airs, and frequently whole

operas in their barbarous jargon, that *faceva furore*. Her dancing the national dance, the tarantella, was beautiful. The buffo who acted with her, by name Casacciello, a man of enormous corpulence, could speak, I believe, nothing but Neapolitan patois, at least he sung nothing else. Coltellini never quitted Naples but once on an engagement to Vienna, but neither there nor at the several places she performed on her journey did she meet with equal success. She was nevertheless an enchanting performer. There were two other theatres for comic operas; at the one were Benini, as first woman, and her husband Mengozzi, whom I shall have occasion to notice at our own opera; at the other was nobody worth remembering.

During Lent, when none but sacred dramas were allowed, the oratorio of Jephthah was acted at the theatre del Fondo, and the principal parts well sustained by Benini, Mengozzi, and Rovedino, the music very good, but I forget the composer. Benini sung sweetly a most beautiful pathetic air as she was going to be

sacrificed. I also heard at Naples a singer retired from the stage, called Aprile, who had been famous in his youth.

Returning through Rome, I attended all the ceremonies of the holy week, which I need not describe, but I cannot pass over wholly in silence the music in the Pope's chapel, though so well known. The Miserere, in particular, sung on three evenings at the office of *Le Tenebre*, has long been esteemed one of the finest of performances: but no one can imagine the effect produced by the perfect union of the finest voices, proceeding from concealed performers, in such a place, nearly in darkness, with all the imposing circumstances attending it, but those who have heard it. Nothing can be more affecting or sublime. At that time the first singer was Cristoferi, no longer a young man, but still possessing a beautiful voice. All the choir are *tonsurés*, and wear the ecclesiastical habit: they are not permitted to sing at any theatre, but I heard Cristoferi often in private, and at the oratorios before alluded to. The grand mass in St. Peter's on Easter Sunday is performed by

the same singers, and like the music in the Sistine chapel, without any instrument whatever, not even the organ, none being ever used where the Pope is present.

The spring being the season for fairs in Italy, at which there is always an opera, I heard several in my journey northward, of which two deserve to be particularly mentioned.

The first of these was at Mantua, to which place I went for the express purpose of hearing the celebrated Marchesi, who will receive due notice and praise hereafter. The first woman was Pozzi, of whom at parting I must observe, that although she had deservedly risen to the head of her profession, was a good singer, and had a voice of uncommon clearness and brilliancy, yet its tones were so bird-like, and there was such a want of feeling in her manner both of singing and acting, that she was on the whole a cold and uninteresting performer. The tenor was Scovelli, the second man Manzoletto, who had also been at Naples in the carnival. The opera was Arminio, by Tarchi, composed expressly for Marchesi, with whose performance I was very much pleased.

At Reggio I heard for the first time that first of singers Banti, of whom I shall speak at length when I have to give the account of her long residence in England. She was performing in Sarti's opera of Medonte with Porri (who so haunted me) and Ansani, but unfortunately the latter was ill and could not sing the night I was there, so that the opera was acted *without* the part of Medonte. Banti's singing however was delightful.

This was my *bonne bouche*, and the last music I heard in Italy, the great theatres of Milan and Turin not being open when I passed through those towns. Upon the whole I was surprised at hearing so little very good in that country, and still more so at the extreme badness of much which I have passed over unnoticed. At the small towns, such as Nice, Trieste, and others, there were operas, if indeed they deserved that name, for the singers were little better than those of the streets, and would not have been tolerated for a moment in England. But the passion for music cannot be so great in that land of song as we are apt to suppose: for on inquiring in any town if

the opera was good, I was uniformly answered, Oh! si; bellissimi *balli!* and indeed in general the dances are more thought of, and attended to in greater *silence,* than the opera itself, in which, if there is one, or at most two good performers, and as many good songs, it is quite sufficient, and the rest may be as bad as possible without giving any offence. Yet the ballets are long and wearisome in the extreme, absolute tragedies in pantomime (I saw Romeo and Juliet *danced)*; and nothing is to me so delightful as a really good opera.

The accounts I received during this time of the opera in England were extremely unfavorable; yet the Italians assured me that it possessed some of their best singers in Crescentini, Babbini, and la Ferrarese, who then composed the company. If so, they were very ill judged of and ill treated here, for Crescentini was thought so moderate a performer, and so little liked, that before the season was half over he was superseded by Tenducci (who very many years before had sung, chiefly as second man) in Gluck's Orfeo. But the performance of an old man, who had never been

very capital, and could now have scarcely any voice left, and that too in a part in which many still remembered Guadagni, was not likely to prove very attractive. Rauzzini then re-appeared in an opera of his own composing, called La Regina di Golconda, a drama in the French style, intermixed with dances, there being an unusually numerous and fine set of dancers that year. But nothing succeeded; in spite of all efforts, the manager became a bankrupt, and the theatre was prematurely closed before the usual end of the season.

It is but justice to Crescentini to add, that when he was here he was very young, and might not have attained that excellence which has since obtained him the reputation of a first-rate singer. He never returned to this country.

I did not reach England till near the end of the summer of 1785, long after the opera-house had been shut up, and not in time to be present at the great musical festival which had taken place (for the second time) in Westminster Abbey. Though I did not therefore hear any of those surprising performances

till the following spring, yet it may be convenient to give some account of them in this place, that I may not interrupt that of the opera when resumed.

The first performance of these concerts was in commemoration of Handel in the preceding year (1784); on which occasion they gave such universal satisfaction, particularly to their Majesties, under whose patronage they took place, that they were repeated for several years following, and always with equal success. The orchestra in the first year, when it was the smallest, consisted of between five and six hundred performers, vocal and instrumental. The number was annually encreased, till it amounted to near a thousand. Yet such was the admirable manner in which this prodigious band was conducted by Mr. Bates at the organ, and Cramer as leader, that not even the smallest ever executed music with greater precision. It was as one instrument. To facilitate the execution in both departments, the *long movement* (now in common use) was for the first time applied to the organ, which placing Mr. Bates much below

and at a great distance from the instrument, while Cramer stood between it and the conductor, enabled both to see, and act in perfect concert with each other. It also put Mr. Bates into such a position that he could see not only every instrumental performer ranged in front, but all the chorus singers occupying the aisles on each side. To give force and fullness to the orchestra, larger instruments were also invented and made expressly for this occasion; double kettle-drums, bass trumpets and trombones, and even *double* double-basses, all of which added surprizingly to the harmony, and were indeed necessary to make the bass sufficiently powerful to counterbalance so vast a band of violins. The chorusses too were performed with equal excellence, under the direction of the most able musical professors. The first singer on all these occasions was Madame Mara, who had come to sing at the Pantheon concerts. All the best Italian as well as English singers were likweise engaged. The music was confined to that of Handel, the burst of one of whose chorusses caused a general thrill,

and was sublime beyond imagination. Yet from the vastness of that venerable pile, never was the fullest piece of music in the least degree too loud even to those who were near the orchestra, while its construction was so favourable to sound, that Mara's single voice, or Cramer's single fiddle, were heard most distinctly in every part. It was remarkable that even the tuning of this immense band, generally so discordant, accompanied as it was by the full chords of a noble organ, produced a fine and harmonious effect. On the whole, it was acknowledged by all, even by foreigners, that no performance was ever heard so perfect, or so surprising. The sight too was striking and beautiful. The vast space and solemnity of the building, the king and queen, with all the royal family and their court, occupying one end, the enormous orchestra, with its magnificent organ, at the other, filling up the whole space even to the top of the arches, and the thousands of full-dressed auditors ranged on the floor, and in galleries constructed over the side aisles, all listening in

breathless silence, (a silence almost devotional, and never broken by that applause which would have misbecome the sanctity of the place) formed altogether a spectacle at once interesting and imposing.*

* Within the last few years two performances on the same plan have taken place in York Minster, which rivalled, and it is said, almost equalled their model; but there was no Mara to head the vocal department. On the first occasion Catalani sung at them, a poor substitute in sacred music, though her voice must have filled the vast space and been heard there to great advantage: on the second, there was no female singer of great note, or of sufficient power.

SECTION IV.

1786—1792.

Madame Mara—Babbini—Rubinelli—Benini and Mengozzi—Storace—Morelli—Marchesi—Burning of the King's Theatre—Opera at the little theatre in the Haymarket—Concert at the Pantheon—Pacchierotti returned—Opera at the Pantheon—Performances at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket—David—Burning of the Pantheon—Opera at the little theatre.

I NOW proceed to the revival of the opera after its unfortunate interruption.

With no small difficulty arrangements were at length made for re-opening the theatre in the beginning of the year 1786; but no new performers having arrived from Italy, the company was not completed till the middle of the season, which began with Madame Mara as first woman (and for a time the sole support of the opera): her first appearance on the stage. There being no first man, the tenor Babbini filled that part, and his own was consigned to

Tasca, the bass, who had played in the comic opera of the preceding year. The first opera was Didone, a pasticcio, for which Mara had made a very judicious selection of songs, introducing four of very different characters, by Sacchini, Piccini, and other composers, all of which were so much and so equally admired, that two were encored every night, each of them receiving that mark of approbation in its turn. Mara's talents as a singer (for she was no actress and had a bad person for the stage) were of the very first order. Her voice, clear, sweet, distinct, was sufficiently powerful, though rather thin, and it's agility and flexibility rendered her a most excellent bravura singer, in which style she was unrivalled; and though she succeeded so well in some of Handel's most solemn and pathetic songs, yet while it was impossible to find fault, still there appeared to be a want of that feeling in herself, which, nevertheless, she could communicate to her hearers. Her performance in this opera was perfect, and gave entire satisfaction. She next revived an opera of Sacchini, called Perseo, which had been produced

in the time of Millico and Miss Davies, whose style of singing was much the same. In this too the first man's part was performed by Babbini, of whom, notwithstanding the favorable report I had heard of him, I cannot say much in praise. He might be a good singer as far as knowledge of music could make him one, but he was unequal to producing much effect from the weakness of his voice, which it seemed a painful effort to him to exert.

The late first woman Ferrarese del Bene, who had been also much extolled to me, was but a very moderate performer. She was this year degraded to *prima buffa*, but even in that subordinate line was so ineffective, that Sestini was recalled to strengthen the company. But all in vain: the comic opera was little liked, and no more thought of after the arrival of Rubinelli in the spring.

This excellent singer (who has been named before) possessed a contralto voice of fine quality, but limited compass. It was full, round, firm, and steady in slow movements, but had little agility, nor did he attempt to do more than he could execute perfectly. His

style was the true cantabile, in which few could excel him : his taste was admirable and his science great; his figure tall and commanding, his manner and action solemn and dignified. In short, he must be reckoned, if not the first, yet of the first class of fine singers. The opera he chose for his debût was Virginia by Tarchi, which was received with the highest applause.

In the following year Mara, Rubinelli, and Babbini remained for the serious opera, and several new ones were produced. Alceste by Gresnich (Metastasio's Demetrio), La Vestale by Rauzzini, Armida by Mortellari, and in order to induce the king to visit the theatre called his own, but which he seldom frequented, the Giulio Cesare of Handel was revived, or rather a medley from his Italian works, for little of the original music was retained, and many of his most favorite songs from other operas were introduced, Verdi prati, Dove sei, Rendi sereno il ciglio, and others. This ancient music was particularly suited to Rubinelli, and was familiar to Mara, both of whom sung it incomparably well. Nothing could be

finer than the delivery of the famous Recitative Alma del gran Pompeo by the former. But in the inferior parts it was miserably executed, and the effect was absolutely ludicrous. It however answered the end proposed; the King came two or three times to hear it, and it was pretty generally liked by the public: at least it filled the house by attracting the exclusive lovers of the old style, who held cheap all other operatical performances.

While such was the flourishing state of the serious opera, the comic underwent a total change much for the better, and began to regain popularity, especially towards the close of the season. At the beginning of it, Benini and Mengozzi, whom I have mentioned before, came to fill the first parts. The former had a voice of exquisite sweetness, and a finished taste and neatness in her manner of singing: but she had so little power, that she could not be heard to advantage in so large a theatre: her performance in a small one was perfect. Though from this want of strength she was generally confined to comic operas, yet her appearance and style seemed much more

adapted to the serious, for which she had sufficient feeling and expression, as I had witnessed in her excellent performance of Jephthah's daughter; and during an indisposition of Mara she filled with great sweetness, and much more appropriate figure and manner, her part of Virginia. Indeed she had not that gaiety of countenance nor vivacity of manner requisite for a prima *buffa*. Her husband, Mengozzi was a good tenor, but also wanted power; this climate really disagreed with him, and injured his voice, so that he was prevented by illness from appearing in the first opera with Benini, nor did he ever quite recover all the powers he possessed. This to her was a very great disadvantage, his substitute being execrable.

Both these singers, of very considerable merit, if they had had a better opportunity of displaying it, were superseded in the spring of this year (1787) by the arrival of Storace and Morelli, who came out in Gli Schiavi per amore, a very pretty opera of Paesiello's, in which Sestini performed the second woman's part, and Morigi, who had long been the first buffo

caricato, became second to Morelli. This opera was universally admired, and ran without any change to the end of the season. Morelli had a bass voice of great power, and good quality, and he was a very good actor. Having been *running footman* to Lord Cowper at Florence, he could not be a great musician. He continued for many years in great favor, and sung occasionally at the opera till he had scarcely a tone left: but he was always received kindly, as an old and deserving servant of the public.

Storace was by birth, and parentage on her mother's side, English, but went early to Italy, and was never heard in this country till her reputation as the first buffa of her time was fully established. She had a harshness in her countenance, a clumsiness of figure, a coarseness in her voice, and vulgarity of manner, that totally unfitted her for the serious opera which she never attempted. But her knowledge of music was equal to any thing, and she could sing well in every style, as was proved by her performances in Westminster Abbey, where she sung with the best effect: in my

opinion she rarely appeared to greater advantage, for in that space the harshness of her voice was lost, while its power and clearness filled the whole of it. In her own particular line on the stage she was unrivalled, being an excellent actress, as well as a masterly singer. She settled entirely in England, and after quitting the opera (to which she was frequently recalled in times of distress, when the performers engaged proved bad, as was too often the case,) she engaged at Drury Lane, where the English opera was raised to an excellence not known before, by her singing, with that of Mrs. Crouch, Mrs. Bland, Kelly, and Bannister, and under the direction of her brother Stephen Storace, who composed, or rather compiled, several very pretty operas, of which the Haunted Tower, and the Siege of Belgrade still remain favorites, and are frequently performed. Her voice being of a nature soon to crack and grow husky, on finding her powers decline she left the stage some time before her death, which took place a few years ago. It was very little known that she had been married at Vienna, to one Fisher, a doctor of

music, and player on the fiddle. The ceremony was performed by a protestant German clergyman in the chapel of the Dutch ambassador. Prince Adam Auersperg and myself led the bride to the altar, and our minister Sir Robert Keith (whose proxy I had been) gave the wedding dinner; but the union was productive of so little happiness, that a separation soon took place, she never bore his name, and Dr. Fisher was heard of no more.

The engagements of Rubinelli and Mara having terminated, and the former left England, the season of 1788 begun with comic operas only, in which Storace still took the lead. Benucci, who has been already mentioned, was the first buffo, but notwithstanding his fine bass voice and excellent acting, was not so much admired as his talents deserved. He remained here but one season. It was not till after the carnival that the serious singers who were engaged could leave Italy. At length in the spring arrived the celebrated Marchesi, whose fame had long reached this country, and who had been extolled to such a degree that impatience and expectation

were raised to the highest pitch; and on the first night of his appearance the theatre was not only crowded to the utmost in every part, but on the rising of the curtain, the stage was so full of spectators that it was some time before order and silence could be obtained, and with some difficulty that Marchesi, who was to open the opera, could make his way before the audience. Marchesi was at this time a very well-looking young man, of good figure, and graceful deportment. His acting was spirited and expressive: his vocal powers were very great, his voice of extensive compass, but a little inclined to be thick. His execution was very considerable, and he was rather too fond of displaying it, nor was his cantabile singing equal to his bravura. In recitative, and scenes of energy and passion he was incomparable, and had he been less lavish of ornaments, which were not always appropriate, and had possessed a more pure and simple taste, his performance would have been faultless: it was always striking, animated, and effective. He chose for his debut Sarti's beautiful opera of Giulio Sabino, in

which all the songs of the principal character, and they are many and various, are of the very finest description. But I was a little disappointed at Marchesi's execution of them, for they were all familiar to me, as I had repeatedly heard Pacchierotti sing them in private, and I missed his tender expression, particularly in the last pathetic scene, and lamented that their simplicity should be injured, as it was, by an over-flowery style. The comparison made me like Marchesi less than I had done at Mantua, or than I did in other subsequent operas here. He was received with rapturous applause.

The first woman, Giuliani, was a very inferior performer, and had an uncertain, thin voice, not always perfectly in tune; yet she was not without merit, had a good figure for the stage, and acted well. The new tenor, Forlivesi, was very indifferent, not near so good as his predecessor.

All these singers remained for the ensuing season, but the good comic performers were dismissed, and exchanged for a new set, all execrably bad. The dancers too this year

were so insufferable, that dissatisfaction was loudly expressed every night, and the manager was at last compelled to send to Paris for more and better performers, amongst whom came the famous Mademoiselle Guimard, then, it was said, near sixty years old, but still full of grace and gentility, and she had never possessed more.

This season ended disastrously; for a short time before its close the performances were stopped by the destruction of the opera-house, which was entirely burnt down, not without strong suspicion of its having been maliciously set on fire. The few remaining representations were given at Covent-garden after the season for plays was concluded, early in June. Thus was a second more fatal, and longer, interterruption given to the unfortuate King's Theatre, and great dismay arose lest there could be no opera at all the next winter. Arrangements however were made for carrying it on, upon a less splendid scale, at the little theatre in the Haymarket, which being temporarily altered and fitted up with greater convenience for the purpose, was opened with

serious and comic operas. The latter were again detestable (Sestini, though nominally second woman, being the best, and only tolerable performer) till Storace was called in for their support. But in the former, Marchesi was still first man, and Mara resumed her station in the room of Giuliani, so that the season was as successful as the smallness of the house would permit. The best new opera performed here was Demofoonte, but it was inferior to the former one of that name. The other operas in which Marchesi had most distinguished himself were, l'Olimpiade, Alessandro nell'Indie by Tarchi, and Il Disertore, a drama taken from the French play of Mercier.

The lovers of music, who from the small size of the theatre could not frequent the opera, had this year another resource in the Pantheon, where there were excellent concerts, for which Pacchierotti had returned to England: so that London possessed at once the two finest singers of Italy. Once only they sung in the same room, at a private concert given by Lord Buckingham, when both

exerted themselves to the utmost in friendly rivalship, and their combined efforts afforded the highest gratification. It was difficult to decide the point of *precedence* between two such great and equal performers; but both were civil and obliging men, despising the petty distinctions of which inferior performers are so tenacious, and Marchesi of his own accord yielded to his senior, Pacchierotti.* At the closing of the opera, the former left England.

The King's Theatre being rebuilt before the usual time for opening it, it was expected that the performances would recommence with splendor. But fresh and unforeseen difficulties arose, another theatre having been prepared for operas, under other managers, who had not only secured the Lord Chamberlain's licence, but even got the sanction of the King to call it *his* theatre. This was the Pantheon, in its original state the largest and most beautiful room in London, and a very model of fine architecture. It was the chef-

* That is, sung before him, and left the *last* song to Pacchierotti.

d'œuvre of Wyatt, who himself contrived and executed its transformation, taking care not to injure any part of the building, and so concealing its columns and closing its dome, that it might be easily restored after its temporary purpose was answered, it being then in contemplation to erect an entirely new and magnificent opera-house elsewhere, a project which could never be realised. Mr. Wyatt by this conversion produced one of the prettiest, and by far the most genteel and comfortable theatre I ever saw, of a moderate size and excellent shape, and admirably adapted both for seeing and hearing. Here the regular opera was successfully carried on, with two very good companies and ballets. Pacchierotti, Mara, and Lazzarini, a very pleasing singer with a sweet tenor voice, being at the head of the serious; and Casentini, a pretty woman and genteel actress, with Lazzarini for tenor, Morelli and Cipriani principal buffos, composing the comic. This was the first time that Pacchierotti had met with a good prima donna since Madame Lebrun: his duettos with Mara were the

most perfect pieces of execution I ever heard. The operas in which they performed together were Sacchini's Rinaldo and Bertoni's Quinto Fabio, revived, and a charming new one by Sarti, called Idalide, or La Vergine del Sole. The best comic were La Molinara, and La Locanda, both by Paesiello, and La bella Pescatrice by Guglielmi. On the whole I never enjoyed the opera so well as at this theatre.

In the mean while the proprietors of that in the Haymarket had engaged a number of performers without the precaution of first ascertaining whether they could have a license for employing them. At the head of the vocal department, or rather, I should say, the *only* vocal performer, was David, whom I had heard at Naples. There were no other singers of even tolerable merit, but a numerous and good set of dancers. After these incautious preparations, it was with difficulty they at length succeeded in getting leave to open the theatre with *music* and dancing; but the permission not extending to dramatic performances, no opera could be

acted. That of Pirro had been prepared, but was heard only at one dressed rehearsal *gratis*. The subsequent performances consisted only of a vocal concert with ballets; and as there was no better female singer than poor old Sestini, and few of any sort that could be brought forward at a concert, two or three detached single songs by David were not attractive enough to carry many to the theatre, had not party run high on the occasion, its patronizers being rancorous against the Lord Chamberlain and the *Pantheonites*. David was unfortunate in having no better opportunity for the display of his great talents during his short stay in this country, where he was less known than his merits deserved, or than any other singer of equal eminence. He was undoubtedly the first tenor of his time, possessing a powerful and well-toned voice, great execution as well as knowledge of music, and an excellent style of singing. One of his last performances was in Westminster Abbey, at the last of those festivals, when the orchestra had to boast an assem-

blage of talent rarely met with, in Pacchierotti, Mara, David, and Storace.

A German singer, whose name I forget, had been engaged as first woman for the Haymarket, and sung in the rehearsal of Pirro: but finding no operas could be acted, she would not sing at the concerts, and went away without being heard elsewhere. She was said to be an excellent musician, and probably was a good singer of the *old* school, for she was the scholar of a very celebrated performer, Signora Mingotti, who had been a great favourite in this country above thirty years before, and was not only first singer, but manager of the opera for a considerable period. She came over to England again with her pupil, and I once or twice heard the old lady sing with a tremulous, but still strong voice, some of her most admired old songs. Her usual residence was Munich, where I had also heard her, she having invited me to her house for that purpose, out of regard to my family, who had been among the number of her friends and patrons here.

Thus ended the season of the year 1791.

In the next, the Haymarket Theatre never opened at all, and that of the Pantheon with comic operas only, by the same singers as the preceding year. But scarcely had the performances begun before that theatre also was burnt to the ground, and by this disaster not merely was a pretty opera-house lost, but one of the greatest architectural ornaments of the metropolis entirely destroyed. The proprietors of the rival theatre were very unjustly accused of being accessary to this misfortune, which, in this instance, was really occasioned only by accident. The opera again took refuge in the little theatre in the Haymarket and went on with tolerable success to the end of the season.

No male singer of eminence now remaining in this country, and none having from this time appeared on our stage of equal excellence, I would here make a few general remarks on the three finest that have ever lived in my memory, and the last of their line, of any note or distinguished merit, that Italy ever produced. In comparing them together

I should say that Rubinelli was the most simple, Marchesi the most brilliant, Pacchierotti the most touching singer. The style of the first was chaste and dignified; that of the second florid and spirited; while the third, combining all styles, and joining to exuberance of fancy the purest taste and most correct judgment, united every excellence, could by his variety please all descriptions of hearers, and give unqualified delight to every true lover of really good music.*

* Of these three celebrated singers Marchesi alone survives: Rubinelli died long since in the prime of life, and Pacchierotti a few years ago at Padua, where he had settled and lived in easy circumstances to an advanced age.

SECTION V.

1793—1802.

King's Theatre re-opened—Mara, her departure and subsequent return—Banti—Tour in Germany.

During the theatrical recess, negotiations were opened, and at last brought to a successful termination, for putting an end to the schism which had, with no little acrimony, divided the musical world, and for adjusting the claims of the rival managers. This was effected by a union of parties, and an arrangement was made for re-opening the Haymarket theatre in the winter. But there was not time to bring over any new company of performers, and the best then in England were collected, with Mara at their head.

The only new singer was the first man, Bruni, whom I had heard at Florence. He certainly was improved since that time, but still he was very weak and poor in compa-

rison with his predecessors. He would indeed at times recall some of the tones and manner of Rubinelli, but was greatly inferior to him in every respect.

The tenor was Kelly, new to the opera, but not to the town, as he had sung for several years at Drury Lane. Though he was a good musician, and not a bad singer, having been long in Italy, yet he had retained, or regained, so much of the English vulgarity of manner, that he was never greatly liked at this theatre, where however he sung occasionally for a good many seasons, and became very useful as stage manager.

The comic opera had no novelty. Casentini (now married to Borghi, second violin player of the opera) sung for a short time, but she was not in good health, and her voice was too weak for this theatre. Storace therefore, as usual, was re-engaged, and, aided by Kelly, Morelli, and Rovedino, gave some very good opera buffas, particularly that of I Zingari in fiera, by Paesiello, which was extremely well acted, and gave great satis-

faction. Thus passed the season without any marked success or failure.

Mara was now however beginning to decline in voice and favour, as she advanced in age. When not engaged at the opera, she had continued here, singing at the Ancient Music and other concerts. For a short time she sung also at Covent-garden, where she was rather out of her place. She could not sing ill, but was not exactly suited for the *pretty Polly* of the Beggar's Opera, one of the characters she there assumed. At another time she sung at Drury Lane, or rather with the Drury Lane company, while they performed at the Opera-house during the rebuilding of their own theatre, when the original one of Garrick was pulled down, and the very large house erected which was subsequently burnt. On this occasion she performed in an English serious opera of Dido, in which she retained only one song of her Didone; the brilliant bravura, Son Regina of Sacchini. Mrs. Crouch performed the part of first man, and Kelly that of the tenor. It did

not greatly succeed, though the music was good and well sung.*

At length she suddenly quitted the country in no very creditable manner: for in the maturity of charms which had never been great, she eloped from her husband, an idle drunken man, and bad player on the violoncello, and went off with the young flute player Florio. With him she fled to the uttermost parts of Europe, and lived for several years in Russia, till, when she was almost forgotten, she re-appeared as suddenly and in as singular a manner as she had vanished. A very few years ago, an advertisement from Messrs. Knyvett announced for their concerts a most celebrated singer whom they were not yet at liberty to name. This mysterious secret was soon after explained by another announcement, that *Madame Mara's* benefit concert would take place at the King's Theatre on an

* This is not surprising, the serious opera being ill suited to our stage, and our language to recitative. None ever succeeded but Dr. Arne's Artaxerxes, which at first was supported by some Italian singers, Tenducci being the original Arbaces.

evening specified, no one being at all aware of her return to England, or even of her existence. She must then have been at least seventy; but it was said that her voice had miraculously returned, and was again as fine as ever. But when she displayed these wonderfully revived powers, they proved, as might be expected, lamentably deficient, and the tones she produced were compared to those of a *penny trumpet*. Curiosity was so little excited that the concert was ill attended: but this single exhibition was sufficient to induce Messrs. Knyvett to relinquish her services, and Madame Mara was heard no more. I was not so lucky (or unlucky) as to hear these her last notes, as it was early in the winter, and I was not in town.

We are now come to an interesting period in operatical history, the arrival of Banti, whom I must ever consider as far the most delightful singer I ever heard. She had begun the world as a *cantante di piazza*, and as such having attracted notice by her fine voice, she had been taken from her humble calling, taught, and brought out as a singer in

concerts, first at Paris, and then in England, as before mentioned, at the Pantheon, under the name of Giorgi. But though she had the best masters, she was an idle scholar, and never would apply to the drudgery of her profession: but in her, genius supplied the place of science, and the most correct ear, with the most exquisite taste, enabled her to sing with more effect, more expression, and more apparent knowledge of her art, than many much better professors. She never was a good musician, nor could sing at sight with ease; but having once learnt a song, and made herself mistress of its character, she threw into all she sung more pathos and true feeling than any of her competitors. Her natural powers were of the finest description: her voice, sweet and beautiful throughout, had not a fault in any part of its unusually extensive compass. Its lower notes, which reached below ordinary sopranos, were rich and mellow; the middle full and powerful, and the very high totally devoid of shrillness: the whole was even and regular, one of those rich *voci di petto*, which can alone completely

please and satisfy the ear. In her youth it extended to the highest pitch, and was capable of such agility that she practised and excelled most in the bravura style, in which she had no superior; but losing a few of her upper notes, and acquiring a taste for the cantabile, she gave herself up almost entirely to the latter, in which she had no equal.

Her first appearance in this country was in the opera of Semiramide, or La Vendetta di Nino, by Bianchi, and all her part in it was of the most beautiful description. In addition to the songs belonging to the opera, she introduced a remarkably fine air by Guglielmi, from the oratorio of Deborah, with an accompaniment for a violin obligato, originally played by Cramer, afterwards by Viotti and others. This song, though long and one of great exertion, was so prodigious a favourite that it never failed of being *encored*, not only in its novelty, but in every subsequent revival. Her acting, and recitative were excellent, and in the last scene, where Semiramide dies, was incomparably fine. No opera ever had geater success or a longer run

than this; indeed it was one of those of which it is impossible to tire. She was but poorly supported in it; the first man, Roselli, who was substituted for Bruni, having a feeble and very limited voice, but he was possessed of some taste, and with more power would have been a good singer. For want of a tenor, Rovedino was employed to fill that part.

In her second season, another soprano, named Neri was tried, but he was so much worse that he could not be tolerated for more than one opera, and was immediately dismissed. After an interval Roselli was recalled: Kelly also was engaged as tenor, until the return of Viganoni to this country.

In a subsequent season, (1800) she flattered me highly by desiring to perform for her benefit an opera of my composition, which on private trial she had found to suit her voice. This was the Zenobia of Metastasio, an interesting and pathetic drama, and she gave to the music an effect which its own merits could never have produced in other hands. The first man's part being written

for a soprano was allotted to Roselli, who rehearsed it in private; but his voice and powers were so unequal to its execution that it was found necessary to induce him to give it up, and it was taken by Viganoni, who did it far more justice. The part the latter was to have played, and had actually learnt, was given to Benelli, another tenor of considerable merit, with whose performance I had every reason to be satisfied. Rovedino was the bass; his daughter the second woman. Having granted the use of this opera to Banti only, I withdrew it immediately, and would not permit it to be again represented for the manager, who requested to have it. After this, Roselli sung no more, nor had we ever another soprano at the opera. From this time Viganoni took the part of first man, and continued to fill that station, for which he was well qualified both as singer and actor, during the remainder of Banti's stay, and for some seasons after: little other change was made of the male performers during the many years she resided here.

Among the operas she performed, the most

favorite were Gluck's Alceste, in which she very greatly excelled: three of her songs in it were generally repeated every night: the Ifigenia in Tauride of the same master; Paesiello's beautiful master piece, Elfrida; his Nina, or, La Pazza per Amore; Mitridate by Nasolini, a young composer of great promise, but who died at an early age; Alzira, Merope, Cinna, and others composed expressly for her by Bianchi. Occasionally too she acted in little comic operas, and was particularly successful in Paesiello's intermezzo, La Serva Padrona, which she performed for her benefit with Morelli, and repeated by command of their majesties. Her exertions never flagged, nor did her admirers ever grow weary of her performance. I never wished for another singer; but the public in general began at length to call out for novelty, and Mrs. Billington having returned to England from her tour in Italy, and astonished with her wonderful execution all who heard her at both the play-houses, where she acted alternately, the manager of the opera engaged her for the next season,

and suffered Banti to depart, which she was the more ready to do, because her health began to decline, and she was desirous of returning to her native country, where she did not long survive.

But before the close of her last season (1802), a singular and interesting performance took place. Banti prevailed on Mrs. Billington to perform with her on the night of her benefit, leaving to the latter the choice of the opera, and the principal character. Merope by Portogallo was fixed upon, in which Mrs. Billington acted the heroine of the piece, and Banti took the part of Polifonte, though written for a tenor voice. The curiosity to hear these two celebrated singers together was so great, that the theatre overflowed, and even ladies were obliged to sit on the stage for want of other places. The performance satisfied every expectation, and the applause bestowed equally on both was as rapturous as it was well deserved.

Having thus brought to a close my account (perhaps too long a one) of my most

favorite singer, I will, before I proceed, make cursory mention of the music which I heard abroad during a short tour I made on the continent in the summer and autumn of the year 1802.

Of course I could hear none that was good, or even *bearable,* till I reached Germany. But at Frankfort, during the fair, there was a German opera which gave me considerable pleasure. I there saw the Achilles and the Camilla of Paer, the Axur Ré d'Ormus of Salieri, the Cosa rara of Martini, and other lighter pieces, all well performed. The first female singer was Madame Lang, who had long enjoyed a high reputation in Germany.* She sung with science, and considerable execution, very much in Mara's style; but her voice was evidently in decay, and it was easy to see she had been better. A Mademoiselle Muller sung very agreeably in the comic operas. The first man named Krebs, was come to Frankfort only for the fair from Stutgard, the place of his engage-

* Madame Lang was the sister-in-law of Mozart.

ment. He had a good tenor voice, and sung well. I saw him again at Stutgard, in a charming opera of Weigl, of which the Italian name is L'Amor Marinaro, and it was excellently sung and acted throughout. The first woman, Madame Gley, was a very pleasing performer in every respect: in her person (and she appeared in male attire), as a singer, and as an actress. A duetto between her and Krebs being called for a second time, they repeated it to the Italian words. I endeavoured a year or two ago to get this opera performed here, but could not succeed, though it was acknowledged to be likely to please. The *travestissement* of the first woman was, I believe, the chief obstacle. The compositions of Weigl, though an excellent master, are little known in England.

In passing through Manheim, I heard the Danaides of Salieri, which was moderate both as to the music and performance.

On my way home, I made a short residence at Paris, where there was then an Italian comic opera, at which Lazzarini was first tenor, and the principal female singers Strinasacchi

and Bolla. The former was the favorite, but she did not strike me as particularly good, and seemed a little *passée*. She has since passed some years in England, without singing, being now the wife of Ambrogetti, of whom I shall have to speak at a future period. Bolla had already been in this country, and will also be mentioned hereafter.

Of French music the less that is said the better: but there were at this time at the theatre Feydeau, two singers of great merit, Elleviou and Martin, who had very little of the national manner, and were most excellent actors. The *grand opera* was in no respect improved: that human ears can bear it is marvellous.

SECTION VI.

1803—1813.

Mrs. Billington — Grassini — Catalani — Braham — Tramezzani — Bertinotti — Pantheon theatre re-opened with operas — Retrospective view of the Comic Opera — Morichelli — Bolla, &c.

I RETURN to the Opera, where Mrs. Billington now became sole first woman, with the same moderately good set of male performers, and opened the season of 1803 with the opera of Merope, Viganoni filling the part which Banti had performed. This justly famous singer was born of a musical family; her mother, an English woman, having been a vocal performer of some eminence in her line. As Miss Weichsell, she distinguished herself early in life as a piano-forte player, as her brother did on the violin. She also soon gave promise of vocal excellence. When I first heard her, she was very young and pretty,

had a delightful fresh voice of very high compass, and sung with great neatness several songs composed for Allegranti, whom she closely imitated. She was still young when she first appeared at Covent-garden as Mrs. Billington. After performing at that theatre for several years, she went to Italy to improve her taste, and she returned from thence a finished singer. Her voice, though sweet and flexible, was not of that full nature which formed the charm of Banti's, but was rather a *voce di testa*, and in its very high tones resembled a flute or flageolet. Its agility was very great, and every thing she sung was executed in the neatest manner, and with the utmost precision. Her knowledge of music enabled her to give great variety to her embellishments, which, as her taste was good, were always judicious.

With all these great and undisputed excellences something yet was wanting; for she possessed not the feeling to give touching expression, even when she sung with the utmost delicacy and consummate skill. Her face was handsome, and her countenance full

of good humour, but it was incapable of change, and she was no actress. I therefore missed Banti extremely during her whole first season, and did not admire her as much as the public at large, nor as I afterwards did when I became more fully acquainted with her merits, which, strange to say, I began to appreciate more highly from the very circumstance which rather lowered her favour, and she rose in my estimation from the comparison which tended rather to sink her in that of the public.

The event to which I allude was the arrival of Grassini, who was engaged for the next season as first woman alternately with Mrs. Billington. This very handsome woman was in every thing the direct contrary of her rival. With a beautiful form, and a grace peculiarly her own, she was an excellent actress, and her style of singing was exclusively the cantabile, which became heavy *à la longue*, and bordered a little on the monotonous: for her voice, which it was said had been a high soprano, was by some accident reduced to a low and confined contralto. She had entirely

lost all its upper tones, and possessed little more than one octave of good natural notes; if she attempted to go higher, she produced only a shriek, quite unnatural, and almost painful to the ear. Her first appearance was in La Vergine del Sole, an opera of Mayer's, well suited to her peculiar talents: but her success was not very decisive as a singer, though her acting and her beauty could not fail of exciting high admiration. So equivocal was her reception, that when her benefit was to take place she did not dare encounter it alone, but called in Mrs. Billington to her aid, and she, ever willing to oblige, readily consented to appear with her. The opera composed for the occasion by Winter was Il Ratto di Proserpina, in which Mrs. Billington acted Ceres, and Grassini Proserpine. And now the tide of favour suddenly turned; the performance of the latter carried all the applause, and her graceful figure, her fine expression of face, together with the sweet manner in which she sung several easy simple airs, stamped her at once the reigning favorite. Her deep tones were undoubtedly fine,

and had a particularly good effect when joined with the brilliant voice of Mrs. Billington; but though, from its great success, this opera was frequently repeated, they never sang together in any other. Grassini having attained the summit of the ladder, kicked down the steps by which she had risen, and henceforth stood alone. Not only was she rapturously applauded in public, but she was taken up by the first society, *fêtée*, caressed, and introduced as a regular guest in most of the fashionable assemblies. Of her *private* claims to that distinction it is best to be silent, but her manners and exterior behaviour were proper and genteel.

As I before observed, it was the comparison of these two rival performers that discovered to me the great superiority of Mrs. Billington as a musician and as a singer. But as every one has eyes, and but few musical ears, the superior beauty was the most generally admired, and no doubt the deaf would have been charmed with Grassini, while the blind must have been delighted with Mrs. Billington.

For two more years both these singers continued to perform alternately, and the only material change in the company was the introduction of Braham, at first conjointly with Viganoni, and afterwards as sole first man when the latter quitted the country. Though it seems needless to say much of so well known a performer, yet it is impossible to pass over a singer of Braham's reputation without some remark. All must acknowledge that his voice is of the finest quality, of great power, and occasionally, sweetness. It is equally certain that he has great knowledge of music, and *can* sing extremely well. It is therefore the more to be regretted that he should ever do otherwise, that he should ever quit the natural register of his voice by raising it to an unpleasant falsetto, or force it by too violent exertion: that he should depart from a good style, and correct taste, which he knows and can follow as well as any man, to adopt at times, the over-florid and frittered Italian manner; at others to fall into the coarseness and vulgarity of the English. The fact is,

that he can be two distinct singers according to the audience before whom he performs, and that to gain applause he condescends to sing as ill at the playhouse as he has done well at the opera. His compositions have the same variety, and he can equally write a popular noisy song for the one, or its very opposite for the other. A duetto of his introduced into the opera of Gli Orazi, sung by himself and Grassini, had great beauty, and was in excellent taste. *

The operas in which Mrs. Billington excelled most were La Clemenza di Scipione, composed by the celebrated Bach, and now revived for the first time since it was performed in its novelty by Miss Davies; Paesiello's Elfrida; Armida; Castore e Polluce,

* Braham has done material injury to English singing by producing a host of imitators. What is in itself not good, but may be endured from a fine performer, becomes insufferable in bad imitation. Catalani has done less mischief, only because her powers are *unique* and her astonishing execution unattainable. Many men endeavour to rival Braham; no woman can aspire to being a Catalani.

and others by Winter; and Mozart's Clemenza di Tito, which was the first of his operas ever acted in this country. She likewise occasionally played in comic operas, as will be noticed hereafter.

Grassini performed Gli Orazi e Curiazi, the chef d'œuvre of Cimarosa, and her own (her acting in the last scene being most excellent), Zaira, by Winter, La Morte di Cleopatra by Nasolini, and the Camilla of Paer.

After three years of divided reign, both retired; Mrs. Billington, though in full possession of all her powers, quitting the stage entirely, and Grassini, feeling her extreme high favour a little on the decline, wisely returning to Italy.*

The great, the far-famed Catalani supplied the place of both, and for many years reigned alone, for she would bear no rival, nor any singer sufficiently good to divide the applause. Of this celebrated performer it is well known

* After her retirement from her profession Mrs. Billington lived for a few years in England, and then went again to Italy, where she very soon died.

that her voice is of a most uncommon quality, and capable of exertions almost supernatural. Her throat seems endued (as has been remarked by medical men) with a power of expansion, and muscular motion by no means usual, and when she throws out all her voice to the utmost, it has a volume and strength that are quite surprising, while its agility in divisions, running up and down the scale in semi-tones, and its compass in jumping over two octaves at once, are equally astonishing. It were to be wished she was less lavish in the display of these wonderful powers, and sought to please more than to surprise: but her taste is vicious, her excessive love of ornament spoiling every simple air, and her greatest delight (indeed her chief merit) being in songs of a bold and spirited character, where much is left to her discretion (or indiscretion) without being confined by the accompaniment, but in which she can indulge in ad libitum passages with a luxuriance and redundancy no other singer ever possessed, or if possessing ever practised, and which she carries to a fantastical excess. She is fond of

singing variations on some known simple air, and latterly has pushed this taste to the very height of absurdity by singing, even without words, variations composed for the fiddle. This is absolute nonsense, a lamentable misapplication of that finest of instruments, the human voice, and of the delightful faculty of song. Whenever I hear such an outrageous display of execution, either vocal or instrumental, I never fail to recollect, and cordially join in, the opinion of a late noble statesman, more famous for his wit than for love of music, who, hearing a remark on the extreme *difficulty* of some performance, observed, that he wished it was *impossible*.*

From what has been said it may readily be conceived that Catalani has a bad choice in

* This *bon mot* has generally been given to Dr. Johnson, but I have reason to know it was said by the noble Lord alluded to, of whom a similar one is recorded confirming his distaste for music. Being asked why he did not subscribe to the Ancient Concerts, and it being urged as a reason for it that his brother the Bishop of W********** did, "Oh," replied his Lordship, "if I was as deaf as my brother, I would subscribe too."

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music, and that she prefers the compositions of inferior masters, written expressly for herself, to the more regular of better composers. She found one here precisely to her taste in Pucitta, who had been successful in two very light, but pleasing comic operas. Him she employed to compose for her several serious, to which he was unequal: all of them were very moderate, La Vestale the best. She performed however in many others; Semiramide by Portogallo, which she chose for her début, but it was very inferior to Bianchi's, Mitridate, Elfrida, and much to her dissatisfaction, La Clemenza di Tito, for she detested Mozart's music, which keeps the singer too much under the controul of the orchestra, and too strictly confined to time, which she is apt to violate. Yet she first introduced to our stage his Nozze di Figaro, in which she acted the part of Susanna admirably. In the Orazi she performed the first soprano's part of Curiazio, that of the first woman being filled by Ferlendis, a pretty good actress, at that time first buffa. But she totally disregarded the general effect of an opera, and the

cast of all the other characters, whatever might be the disadvantage of it to the other performers, if she was indulged in her whimsical choice of parts for herself. Thus in Didone, she caused the part of Enea to be done by Madame Dussek, who had neither voice, figure, nor action for the character; and in another opera she made Madame Dussek act the first woman's part, choosing for herself that of the first man.

Latterly she assumed also the place of first buffa, and succeeded equally well in that line. Indeed she gave me more pleasure in the comic than the serious opera, as she sung with greater simplicity and ease. In both, her acting was excellent; in the one majestic, forcible, and expressive; in the other natural, playful, and genteel. Her face and figure were suited to both; for she is very handsome, with a countenance peculiarly fine on the stage, and capable of great variety of expression. Though the outline of her features is decidedly tragic (almost *Siddonian,*) yet she can relax them into the most charming smile, and assume the character not

merely of gaiety, but even of *niaiserie*, and of arch simplicity; so that her versatile powers fit her for every style. With all her faults therefore (and no great singer ever had so many), she must be reckoned a very fine performer, and if the natural powers with which she is so highly gifted were guided by sound taste and judgment, she might have been a perfect one.

The male performers with Catalani were for the most part, of a very inferior description, and fit only for second singers. The first exception was Siboni, who sung well, but with a thick and tremulous voice: he staid however only a short time. After an interval, he was succeeded by Tramezzani, one of the most agreeable tenors I ever remember to have heard. This very good performer was introduced accidentally to our stage, to which he proved so valuable an acquisition. Arriving here without any previous engagement during a season for which Catalani had on some dispute with the manager quitted the theatre, leaving no first rate singers of any sort, and when only comic

operas could be acted, and even those with mediocrity, he was immediately brought forward in a serious one called Sidagero by Guglielmi, which was, in fact an oratorio with a slight change of the words and names. Tramezzani's débût in it was most successful, the music very beautiful, and his performance, especially as an actor, most admirable. He had a very handsome person, and was full of animation and feeling. His voice was of the sweetest quality, of that rich, touching, *cremona* tone peculiar to the Italians, and his singing, if not of the first order, or very scientific, was always pleasing, and full of expression. He continued to be a great favorite during all his stay (of several years) in this country. Two female singers came over with him, both of whom performed in this opera, Calderini as first woman, in every way disagreeable and soon parted with, and Bianchi who remained as a respectable second.

Towards the close of Catalani's engagement, another first woman was brought over to perform alternately with her. This was

Bertinotti, who had a pleasing voice, and a good manner of singing, but after giving satisfaction in one serious opera of Zaira, in which her songs were composed by her husband Radicati, was less successful in a second, upon which she took to the comic opera, and performed extremely well in Mozart's Cosi fan Tutte, which was admirably acted in every part, the other female characters being filled by Collini and Cauvini, two very pretty women, and pleasing actresses, the male by Tramezzani, Cauvini, a very respectable tenor, and Naldi, an excellent buffo. She also sung in the Flauto-magico of the same composer: and Sidagero was revived, in which she performed the part of the first woman far better than her predecessor.

So many performers of considerable talent could not be agreeable to Catalani, whose love of supreme power and sole admiration made their situation so unpleasant, that half the company quitted the theatre, and established themselves at the Pantheon, which had been rebuilt, and undergone a second transformation. On its restoration it was first

fitted up as a concert room, with as much ingenuity to make it ugly as bad taste could invent; and it was as supremely so as it had been beautiful originally. No entertainments having succeeded in it, it was again metamorphosed into a theatre, which the seceders obtained leave to open. These consisted of Bertinotti, Collini, the two Cauvinis, Morelli, (now very old), and a few others to fill up the company, among whom Miss Stephens, now become so favorite a singer, was engaged as *last* woman, being her first appearance on any stage. But as their licence was only for *intermezzos*, or operas of one act, and *dancing* without *ballets d'action*, the performances were not very attractive, and soon ceased. This happened the sooner from a report industriously circulated, and published in the newspapers with the attestation of an architect, that the external walls, though not much injured by the fire, were yet unequal to bearing the weight of the new roof which had been erected upon them, and that the building was unsafe. It was therefore so little frequented, that it soon closed, and the

singers dispersed, most of them, amongst whom was Bertinotti, leaving the country. The theatre still stands, but, its reputation being thus blasted, has never been re-opened, and a house of excellent shape, and great convenience, capable of being made one of the prettiest in London, is thus lost to the public.

Catalani was now the only performer of any eminence remaining in England, and led in both lines: but as one singer does not constitute an opera,* and neither her disposition would bear with others, nor the extravagance of her annually encreasing demands allow the manager to engage them, she at length quitted the theatre at the end of the season of 1813, having first endeavoured to purchase it, and thereby become sole proprietor, sole manager, and sole actress.

Since she left our stage she has never trod any other, except at Paris, where she opened

* Her husband, M. Valabregue, was of a very different opinion: he is reported to have said, "Ma femme, et quatre ou cinq poupées, voilà tout ce qu'il faut."

a small theatre under her own management, but the undertaking was not successful, and it is singular that the most famous singer and actress of her time has remained so long without any theatrical engagement. But her inordinate terms make it impossible for any manager to incur so great an expense, and she has found it more agreeable to her taste, and probably more advantageous to her interest, to travel throughout nearly the whole of Europe *giving* concerts, at which she is generally the only vocal performer. She has made one such visit to England, and may in all probability make more, as she retains a partiality for this country, where she has been more extravagantly admired and paid than in any other. She has had the least success in her own, where she has sung but little, and where her talents are appreciated at their just value. As in what has been said she may have appeared in rather an unamiable light, it is but justice to add, that off the stage there is not an unamiable trait in her character. She is an excellent woman, and in every

relation of private life, her conduct is irreproachable.

As I consider Catalani to be the last great singer heard in this country whose name is likely to be recorded in musical annals; and as, soon after her departure, a new æra began in our opera, I shall here pause, and after going back to notice shortly the comic opera from the time where I interrupted my account of it, shall close this long period with a few general remarks.

So frequent and rapid were the changes which took place in the comic department, that it would be as difficult as unnecessary to observe a strict regularity in the account of them. I shall therefore not attempt it, but only mention the principal singers and performances as they occur to me.

Together with Banti came Morichelli, who was cried up beforehand as her equal if not her superior. If her admirers were forced to admit that her voice was inferior to Banti's, she was, they said, a much better musician. So she might be, but never could have been

half so delightful a singer, and she was now past her prime, her voice was not true, her taste spoilt by a long residence at Paris, where she adopted much of the national style, and her manner and acting were affected. In short, she did not please generally, though there was a strong party for her (who foretold she would in time eclipse her more brilliant rival), and after her second season she went away, leaving behind her in every print shop, her portrait with the flattering, but false inscription, "Partì, ma vide che adorata partiva."

The best of her successors, and far better than herself, was Bolla, a very pretty woman, and pleasing genteel actress, who with a better voice would have been an excellent singer. She was very successful in the Zingari in Fiera, and in Nina, which latter opera she performed for her benefit in a novel and singular manner, the dialogue being spoken in prose without recitative, which had not a bad effect; but this way of acting it was deemed an infringement of the rights of the English theatres, and after a few nights it

was stopped by authority, as unlawful at the Opera.

Such a succession of very indifferent performers followed, none of whom stayed more than one season, some not so long, that I have little to add but a list of names. Among them were Vinci, a *great* woman, with great pretensions, aiming at much, and failing in every thing: Gerbini, a bad singer, without voice, but a good player on the fiddle, having been educated in a conservatorio at Venice: Perini, very near being a good singer, but not agreeable: Fabrizzi, very far from a bad one, but neither young nor pretty, therefore not liked: Angelelli, both young and pretty, but much too weak for the stage, for which she was not designed; for she was the daughter of an English gentleman resident in Italy, and well brought up; with a pretty *voce di camera*, she was a good amateur singer; her theatrical name was feigned, and she was soon after well married in Germany: Poor Allegranti's re-appearance has been mentioned; and some others, too bad to mention at all, just passed in review, and disappeared

immediately. One alone who appeared thus transiently ought to have been more admired, and retained. This was Marconi, an excellent singer and very genteel actress; but her voice was the deepest contralto, of a female's, I ever heard, and she did not please, though she performed in a very pretty opera called Adolfo e Clara (from the French of that name) extremely well acted in all its parts, by Tramezzani, Naldi, and a new buffo with a good voice and considerable talent, whose name I forget, as he too was never engaged, and the opera was laid aside after a very few representations. If Marconi's voice was too low for a prima donna, she would have been of infinite use to the theatre for contralto parts, and an admirable performer of male characters in the serious opera. She staid so short a time in England as to be scarcely known. It happening once that both the first women, serious and comic, were prevented by illness from performing (so that the theatre must have been shut), Mrs. Bland of Drury Lane was engaged for a few nights, and performed very creditably to herself and

agreeably to the audience in the operas of La Frascatana, and Gli Schiavi per Amore.*

Storace was frequently called in, sometimes alone, at others to give additional strength to some particular opera, as in Martini's Arbore di Diana with Fabrizzi, in which also sung Viganoni, Braham, and Morelli. In another season, La Cosa Rara, by the same composer, was performed by the same singers, with the addition of Kelly, and the important substitution of Mrs. Billington for Fabrizzi. Storace likewise appeared with Naldi in his first opera. This excellent actor was a good musician, and as far as his powers allowed, a good singer, but his voice was weak and uncertain. Soon after, Mrs. Billington performed with Naldi in the Fanatico per la Musica, in which she took the opportunity of displaying her talents as an instrumental

* Though Mrs. Bland was only a singer of the second class, few, if any, English singers who have appeared at the opera sung with such pure Italian taste, or equalled her in recitative and pronunciation of the language. Her maiden name was Romanzini, so she might have been of Italian origin.

performer by accompanying herself on the piano-forte.

Recourse was occasionally had to Mrs. Dickons, but she produced little effect on the Italian stage: her best part was the Countess in Figaro.

Ferlendis, who has been already alluded to, was I think less liked than she deserved, for she had a very good contralto voice, and was far from a bad buffa. She would have been thought, too, to have acted the part of Orazia well, had it not been for the comparison with Grassini, and for Catalani's then eclipsing every body. On Catalani's temporary secession, Collini was engaged, but soon found unequal to a first woman's part; and to her was added the wife of the composer Pucitta, whose two comic operas were then performed with considerable success. The most favorite was La Caccia di Enrico, which Catalani herself afterwards acted, but changed and added to the music. The two above-named singers were both very good as seconds, and the former of them having a

fine contralto voice, was often employed as first man in serious operas.

At length, Catalani assumed both departments, and after her leaving our stage they were rarely separated, the whole style of operas being in a year or two materially changed, as I shall presently show.

But first I would take a short retrospective view of the two last periods, and bring into comparison with each other the five great female singers of whom I have spoken so much at length individually.

They may be divided into two classes, of which Madame Mara and Mrs. Billington form the first; and they were in most respects so similar, that the same observations will apply equally to both. Both were excellent musicians, thoroughly skilled in their profession: both had voices of uncommon sweetness and agility, particularly suited to the bravura style, and executed to perfection, and with good taste, every thing they sung. But neither was an Italian, and consequently both were deficient in recitative: neither

had much feeling; both were deficient in theatrical talents, and they were absolutely null as actresses; therefore they were more calculated to give pleasure in the concert-room than on the stage.

The other three on the contrary had great and distinguished dramatic talents, and seemed born for the theatrical profession. They were all likewise but indifferently skilled in music, supplying by genius what they wanted in science, and thereby producing the greatest and most striking effects on the stage: these are their points of resemblance. Their distinctive differences, I should say were these: Grassini was all grace, Catalani all fire, Banti all feeling; and by a singular coincidence, forming almost exact counterparts of the three great singers before compared together, the first may be said to have borne a strong resemblance in her style to Rubinelli, the second to Marchesi, and the third to have united in a high degree all the varied excellences of Pacchierotti.

SECTION VII.

1814—1823.

Change of style in music and modern operas—Rossini—Mozart—Short account of the opera during this period—Camporese.

THE opera in England for the last period of ten years since the departure of Catalani, will afford much less room for observation than any of the preceding, as far as the singers are concerned; for, with one single exception, there have not been any of whom I feel inclined to say much, because there is not much to be said in their praise. But so great a change has taken place in the character of the dramas, in the style of the music, and in its performance, that I cannot help enlarging a little on that subject before I proceed farther.

One of the most material alterations is, that the grand distinction between serious

and comic operas is nearly at an end, the separation of the singers for their performance entirely so. Not only do the same sing in both, but a new species of drama has arisen, a kind of mongrel between them, called *semi-seria,* which bears the same analogy to the other two that that non-descript, the melo-drama, does to the legitimate tragedy and comedy of the English stage. The construction of these newly invented pieces is essentially different from the old. The dialogue, which used to be carried on in recitative, and which in Metastasio's operas is often so beautiful and interesting, is now cut up (and rendered unintelligible if it were worth listening to) into *pezzi concertati,* or long singing conversations, which present a tedious succession of unconnected, ever-changing motivos, having nothing to do with each other: and if a satisfactory air is for a moment introduced, which the ear would like to dwell upon, to hear modulated, varied, and again returned to, it is broken off before it is well understood or sufficiently heard, by a sudden transition into a totally different

melody, time, and key, and recurs no more; so that no impression can be made, or recollection of it preserved.* Single songs are

* In the periodical paper called The Looker-on (No. 74) is the following passage most apposite to this subject. The author, comparing the arts of painting and music, says,

"In the objects which exercise the sense of seeing, "beauty of figure may be resolved into *uniformity, va-* "*riety*, and *proportion*. *Uniformity*, because it produces "facility of conception, and enables the whole to enter "easily into the mind; *variety*, because it gratifies the "appetite for novelty, and puts the mind into action by "a transition from one contemplation to another; *pro-* "*portion*, because it gratifies our moral sense of fitness "and utility. Beauty in music results from nearly the "same causes: that is, addresses itself to the same "seated principles of the mind. It is here that a vari- "ety of the parts and tones under the same key, that is, "a *particular* variety subordinate to a *general* uniformity, "excites those pleasing sensations which constitute a "sense of beauty. In harmony, that variety is more "complicated, but it is still *variety* under the controul of "of a certain *uniformity*, and submitted to strict rules of "*proportion*."

Nothing can be more just, or more clearly expressed than this definition, or a more decided condemnation by anticipation of the modern style of music. It was written in 1793.

almost exploded, for which one good reason may be given, that there are few singers capable of singing them. Even a prima donna, who would formerly have complained at having less than three or four airs allotted to her, is now satisfied with one trifling cavatina for a whole opera.

The acknowledged decline of singing in general (which the Italians themselves are obliged to confess) has no doubt in a great measure occasioned this change. But another cause has certainly contributed to it, and that is the difference of the voices of the male performers. Sopranos have long ceased to exist, but tenors for a long while filled their place. Now even these have become so scarce, that Italy can produce no more than two or three very good ones. The generality of voices are basses, which for want of better are thrust up into the first characters, even in serious operas where they used only to occupy the last place, to the manifest injury of melody, and total subversion of harmony, in which the lowest part is their peculiar province.

These new first singers are called by the novel appellation of *basso cantante* (which by the bye is a kind of apology, and an acknowledgment that they ought not to sing) and take the lead in operas with almost as much propriety as if the double-bass were to do so in the orchestra, and play the part of the first fiddle. A bass voice is too unbending, and deficient in sweetness for single songs, and fit only for those of inferior character, or of the buffo style. In duettos it does not coalesce well with a female voice, on account of the too great distance between them, and in fuller pieces the ear cannot be satisfied without some good intermediate voices to fill up the interval, and complete the harmony. Yet three or four basses now frequently overpower one weak tenor, who generally plays but a subordinate part.*

* It has always surprised me that the principal characters in two of Mozart's operas should have been written for basses, namely, Count Almaviva, and Don Giovanni, both of which seem particularly to want the more lively tones of a tenor; and I can account for it no otherwise than by supposing they were written for some particular

Composers therefore having few good voices, and few good singers to write for, have been obliged to adapt their compositions to the abilities of those who were to perform them; and as four, five, or six moderate performers produce a better effect jointly than they could by their single efforts, songs have disappeared, and interminable quartettos, quintettos, sestettos, &c. usurp their place. Every opera is filled with such pieces, which in fact are so many finales, such as were never used but at the end of the acts of comic operas,* to which alone they are appropriate.* These after wearying the attention for a longer time than half a dozen old songs, generally conclude by a noisy crash of voices and instruments, in which the harmony is frequently distracted, each personage engaged in the scene having perhaps

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singer who had a bass voice, for he has done so in no other instance.

* In serious operas, while they were in three acts, the two first were ended by a duetto of the first man and woman, and a terzetto with the tenor. The inferior singers never joined in any concerted piece.

to express a different passion, and the whole vocal part almost overpowered by so loud and busy an accompaniment that the voices themselves are nearly lost. It is really distressing to hear the leading voice strained almost to cracking in order to be audible over a full chorus and full orchestra, strengthened often by trumpets, trombones, kettle-drums, and all the noisiest instruments. I confess that I derive little or no pleasure from these pieces, which to my ears are scarcely music, but mere noise.* It is evident that in such compositions each individual singer has little room for displaying either a fine voice or good singing, and that power of lungs is more essential than either. Very good singers therefore are scarcely necessary, and it must be confessed that though there are now none

* I would not be understood to mean that I like no sort of pezzi concertati or chorus. I would only have them in their proper place, fewer and shorter. No opera chorusses are very good, and they should not be long, because being to be sung by memory and by bad singers, it is next to an impossibility that an intricate or elaborate composition should be sung well any where, and at our opera they are generally most miserably performed.

so good, neither are there many so bad as I remember in the inferior characters. In these levelling days, equalization has extended itself to the stage and musical profession: and a kind of mediocrity of talent prevails, which, if it did not occasion the invention of these melo-dramatic pieces is at least very favourable to their execution.*

These observations apply in the strongest

* Since the above was written, I have met with a passage in Schlegel's Lectures on Dramatic Literature (translated by Black), so entirely corroborating what I have said, that I cannot help subjoining it.

"A few only of the operas of Metastasio still keep "possession of the stage, as the change of taste in music "demands a different arrangement of the text. Metas- "tasio seldom has chorusses, and his airs are almost al- "ways for a single voice: with these the scenes uniformly "terminated, and the singer never fails to make his exit "with them. In an opera we now require more frequent "duos and trios, and a *crashing* finale. In fact, the most "difficult problem for the opera poet is the mixing "the complicated voices of conflicting passions in one "common harmony, without injuring their essence: a "problem however which is generally solved by both "poet and musical composer in a very arbitrary manner."

The consequence of this is that all the new dramas,

manner to the compositions of the present favorite (I might almost say sole) composer of Italy, Rossini, whose music alone is now liked in that country, and with which we have for the last two or three seasons been satiated in this. That he is possessed of genius and invention cannot be denied, but they are not guided by good taste, and may be deemed too fanciful: neither are they inexhaustible, for he is so rapid and so copious a writer that his imagination seems already to be nearly drained, as no one is so great a plagiarist of himself. His compositions are so similar and bear so strong a stamp of peculiarity and *mannerism*, that while it is impossible not to recognize instantly a piece of music as his, it is frequently difficult to distinguish one from another. At least I frankly confess my inability to do so, and that very few of his compositions remain in my memory. This great sameness is of

written for Rossini's music, are most execrably bad, and contain scarcely one line that can be called poetry, or even one of common sense.

course augmented in no slight degree by the style now in vogue. If a single piece of music (or what is to be considered as such) is to contain as many different subjects as would make three or four, the composer's imagination must be wonderfully fertile indeed if the same ideas did not often recur, as the demand for new is at least quadrupled.

Of the operas of Rossini that have been performed here, that of La Gazza Ladra is most peculiarly liable to all the objections I have made to the new style of drama, of which it is the most striking example. Its finales, and many of its very numerous *pezzi concertati* are uncommonly loud, and the lavish use made of the *noisy* instruments appears to my judgment singularly inappropriate to the subject, which though it might have been rendered touching,* is far from calling for such warlike accompaniments. Nothing can be more absurd than the manner in which this simple story is represented in

* That it may be so in a high degree, all must have felt who have seen Miss Kelly act the part in the Maid and the Magpie.

the Italian piece, (taken, as well as the English one on the same subject, from La pie voleuse,) or than to see a young peasant servant girl, accused of a petty theft, led to trial and execution under a guard of soldiers with military music. But this is a *melodrama*, in which it is not merely allowable but almost necessary to violate truth, nature, and probability. This can have been done only to afford the composer an opportunity of indulging his taste for the *fortissimo*.

The opera of Tancredi is much liked by his admirers, and there are certainly two or three very good and pleasing pieces of music in it: but when the principal, or at least the favorite, song of a first man in a *heroic* opera is not only capable of being converted into a *quadrille*, but appears better adapted to that purpose than any other, all idea of its propriety and fitness for its situation must be put totally out of the question. Yet such is the case with the famous air, Di tanti palpiti, which, though pleasing in itself, is composed extremely in the style of a real French *contredanse*. But not this only has been so con-

verted; half of Rossini's operas are turned into quadrilles; nay even Mosé in Egitto, *a sacred Oratorio!* Were it possible so to convert Handel's, we should deem it a *profanation.* But what shall we think of the judgment of that composer who could set solemn words to music so light and trivial as to allow of it? I have often heard it seriously remarked that his operas sound best when thus performed *without* the voices. Strange praise for *vocal* music, which I have ever considered as the finest vehicle for feeling and for passion, and as giving greater expression to words that can otherwise be conveyed; therefore when it is really good they must be inseparably united. At the same time I must allow there is truth in the remark, for Rossini gives so much importance to the orchestra, and so labours his accompaniments, that the vocal part is really often the least prominent, and overwhelmed, not supported.*

* Many songs of the old masters would be very indifferently sung by modern performers, not on account of their difficulty, but their apparent facility. Composers,

The serious operas of Mosé in Egitto (performed here under the name of Pietro l'Eremita) and Otello, are much better than the former which I have named, and contain some very fine pieces: and I must exempt from all censure his Turco in Italia, which is a light, lively, and thoroughly pleasant opera buffa. The Barbiere di Seviglia, La Cenerentola, L'Italiana in Algieri, and Elisabetta, have been also performed, the first with moderate success, the others with none.*

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when writing for a first-rate singer, noted down merely a simple *tema* with the slightest possible accompaniment, which, if sung as written, would be cold, bald, and insipid. It was left to the singer to fill up the outline, to give it the light and shade, and all its grace and expression; which required not only a thorough knowledge of music, but the greatest taste and judgment. No one ever worked on such a canvas like Pacchierotti.

* Since the above was written, three more of Rossini's operas have been performed, La Donna del Lago, Ricciardo, which have been liked, and another that failed totally. Having been unable to go to the theatre I have heard none of them; from the opera books I find there is *not one* song in Ricciardo, and scarcely any in La Donna del Lago.

So entirely has Rossini engrossed the stage, that the operas of no other master are now ever to be heard, with the exception of those of Mozart, and of his, only Don Giovanni and Le Nozze di Figaro are often repeated. La Clemenza di Tito is occasionally revived, but meets with less success. It is singular how every other composer past and present is totally put aside, and those two alone named or thought of. That Mozart should be admired is not at all so, for he was undoubtedly one of the greatest of masters: it is only strange that though he has been so long dead, his works should have been but so lately known and performed in this country. Of their beauty, their originality, their infinite variety, and scientific excellence there can be but one opinion, though by some his style may be thought not quite so agreeable as that of some of the excellent Italian masters whom I have had occasion to name. It may at times have a little too much of the German manner, as many of his operas were composed for his native language and German singers. But his genius was not only original,

it was inexhaustible; his productions are full of diversity, and all possessed of intrinsic merit. The frippery and meretricious style of modern music is to the ear like tinsel to the eye, brilliant, striking, for a moment perhaps captivating, but it will be transitory, and speedily lost in the fluctuations of taste; and I think I may venture to predict, that Rossini will not long have ceased to write before he will cease to be remembered, and that his music will be thrown aside as that of so many of his predecessors and superiors already is: while the name of Mozart, with those of his two great countrymen Handel and Haydn, will live for ever, and his compositions, like theirs, descend as sterling gold to posterity, and be listened to with delight in all times and in all places, so long as the natural taste and feeling for music, common to man in all ages and situations, and the love of its true genuine beauties shall continue to exist.

But it is time to return, after too long a digression, to my original purpose, and to take a brief notice of the singers who have

appeared at our Opera since the period at which I interrupted my account.

After Catalani left this country, the opera gradually declined, and fell at last to such a state of degradation as to cease to be fashionable, and be nearly deserted. It has revived only within the last two or three seasons.

Grassini returned in 1814, but she was no longer what she had been. Her beauty indeed was little diminished, but her acting was more languid and ineffective, at least it appeared so after the more energetic and animated manner of her predecessor. Her voice too was changed; she had endeavoured to regain its upper part, but in so doing she had lost the lower, and instead of a mellow contralto, it was become a hoarse soprano. Still, however, she displayed much of her former grace and style, particularly in her favorite part of Orazia, and in a new opera of Didone by Paer. But on the whole her performance did not satisfy the public, and after one season she departed unregretted.

At the same time Tramezzani also went away.

The next year is a *blank* in operatical history. So wretchedly bad were all the male performers that even their names cannot be remembered. The first woman, Sessi, was alone somewhat of a singer, with whom, though it was difficult to find fault, it was equally so to be pleased.

The following season produced another total change, yet not much for the better. The company was a medley of all nations; of Russian, Spanish, French, English, with a very small intermixture of Italians. It is true Fodor was an improvement upon Sessi, but she never greatly pleased me. Her voice had sweetness, but she injured and confined it by not opening her mouth, and singing through her teeth. Her style was not truly Italian, nor could it be expected, for she is a Russian married to a Frenchman, had lived much in Paris, and never been in Italy: she is now gone thither and may improve. Yet she was much liked by many, and became

almost a favorite after her performance of Zerlina in Don Giovanni, which opera was brought out for the first time in the second year of her engagement, when a very considerable augmentation was made to the strength of the company; to which were then added Camporese (of whom I shall speak more fully) and Crevelli, an excellent tenor of the old school, with a sonorous mellow voice, and a really good method of singing: but he was reckoned dull, met with no applause, and staid only one year. A new buffo, Ambrogetti, was much more successful. He was indeed deservedly liked, for he was an excellent actor, with a natural vein of humour peculiarly his own; but he was sometimes put into characters unsuited to his turn, to his want of voice, and deficiency as a singer. Yet he acted extremely well; and in a manner too horribly true to nature, the part of the mad father in Paer's beautiful opera of Agnese,* while that of the daughter was delightfully sung by Camporese. These

* This drama is taken from Mrs. Opie's tale of the Father and Daughter.

additional performers, together with the production of Don Giovanni, and of the Nozze di Figaro, were very attractive, and again filled the theatre. Camporese, however, was suffered to go at the end of the season, to the prosperity of which she had so much contributed, and Fodor remained sole first woman for another year.

The opera again declined during this and two following seasons, when Fodor was succeeded by Belloc,* who, though a good singer and actress in comic operas, was not pleasing from the coarseness of her voice and plainness of her person. She was rather like Storace, possessing most of her defects without all her excellencies. She however surprised the public towards the close of her engagement by her excellent performance of the part of Tancredi, for which nothing could be less suited than her figure; but the music was well adapted to her voice, and her singing it was really so good as to make her appearance of no consequence.

* Her name was here *Italianized* into *Bellochi*, but she was married to a Frenchman named Belloc.

The company for the two last seasons and the present, has been throughout respectable, though without any very prominent talent among the male performers. Among them however may be distinguished the first tenor Curioni, who has a very sweet and pleasing voice, and is an agreeable though not a great singer; and Zucchelli, who possesses the most soft, mellow, and flexible bass voice I almost ever heard. But it is headed by two excellent first women, Ronzi de Begnis, and Camporese. The former with a pretty face and pleasing countenance has a voice of great sweetness and flexibility, which she manages with considerable skill and taste, is a good singer, and a good actress, both in serious and comic parts. But she decidedly excels most in the latter: indeed I have rarely seen a better buffa. She made her first appearance in Il Turco in Italia, and acted in it delightfully. Her husband, De Begnis is an excellent comic actor.

Camporese's talent is of a higher order. Born of respectable parents, and married to a member of the family of Giustiniani, she

originally cultivated music only as an accomplishment, yet made herself complete mistress of its science. Subsequent events occasioned her converting what had been her amusement into her profession, and she became a public singer for concerts only.

It was not till her first arrival in this country that she ever appeared on the stage, which she soon trod with all the ease of an experienced actress, and became immediately a very good theatrical performer, yet still retaining on the stage the genteel, lady-like manners for which she is distinguished in private society. She performed first in an opera called Penelope, which was not much admired, nor acted very often; consequently she did not make so favourable an impression as might have been expected from her talents: but every succeeding one developed them more and more, and added to her reputation. Amongst her happiest efforts must be ranked the beautiful and affecting part of Agnese before alluded to. That opera, which is of the *semi-seria* kind, is one of Paer's most charming compositions. She excells greatly

in Desdemona, and in the opera of Mosé; in the latter Ronzi took a principal character. They have likewise sung together in Don Giovanni and Le Nozze di Figaro, Camporese performing Zerlina and Susanna, Ronzi Donna Anna, and the Countess Almaviva: but in both these instances they should have changed characters; for as Ronzi, by her figure, countenance, and sprightliness is best fitted for comic parts, so are Camporese's whole style and demeanour most adapted for serious. In her first year she acted Donna Anna admirably to Fodor's Zerlina, but afterwards assumed the latter from the greater popularity of its many light and pleasing airs. In La Clemenza di Tito she has performed the first man's part, Sesto, and from its being written for a soprano, and therefore suited to her voice, gave more effect to it than either Braham or Tramezzani. She first acted that opera with Fodor, afterwards with Madame Albert, first singer of the *grand opera* at Paris, who chanced to be in England with her husband, the principal dancer. It was a curious novelty to

hear a French singer in our Italian theatre, where, though she did not offend, she gave but little pleasure. But she was a good musician, had great powers, and of course a thorough knowledge of the stage, on which her manner was easy and dignified. As Camporese is still at our Opera(though she intends to leave this country at the end of the season, and it is understood means to retire entirely from the stage), every one has yet the opportunity of judging of her voice and singing. I shall therefore only say that the former, if not of the very finest quality, is extremely agreeable, of sufficient power and compass, and capable of considerable agility: and of the latter, that it is regulated by good taste, and is full of feeling and expression. In short, she is worthy of the better days of the art, and, when she first came to this country, had in no degree adopted the modern style. She then sung only the compositions of the best masters, and her execution of them was faultless. On her return, from having in the interval sung to Italian audiences the more modern music, her manner had undergone

a perceptible alteration; so *infectious* is taste, and so easily, perhaps unconsciously, is it vitiated by bad example either in singers or composers. She has however yielded as little as possible to the prevailing style; and, even with this slight reservation, still is, in my opinion, much the best singer of the present day, and is the only one that has ever at all brought back to my recollection, or in any degree resembles her to whom I shall always think every other must yield, the unique, the incomparable Banti.*

April 1823.

* She is now living at Rome under her proper name of Madame Giustiniani, enjoying ease and respectability, exercising her unimpaired talents for the pleasure of her friends, and never singing out of her own house. She gratefully shows great civilities to the English, to whom she is indebted for her celebrity.

SECTION VIII.

Observations on English music—Sacred music—Glees—Mrs. Sheridan—Mrs. Bates—the Misses Abrams.

HAVING thus brought down the account of the Italian Opera from my earliest recollection to the present time, I will, before I conclude, say something of our national music, and of a few English performers, but my remarks shall be very short.

Our theatrical music must be acknowledged by all candid judges to be greatly inferior to the Italian, although of late years it has improved, and if it continues to do so, and the latter still to decline, the difference will be, and indeed it already is, much less striking than it was within my remembrance. But I shall not add any thing on that subject to the casual notices that have been taken of our stage.

In another style I think we greatly excel, namely, in our church music. I have always been very fond of that of our cathedrals, which is truly solemn and elevating, and better suited to aid devotion than any other that I know. That of the Italians is in general too light and operatic (I except that of the Pope's chapel), and in all Roman Catholic countries the introduction of an orchestra of stringed instruments greatly takes away from the solemnity of the performance. The full swelling tones of the sublime organ should alone be heard, as in ours. With that sole accompaniment our English services, well performed, are to me of the finest description. Sacred music in general has been much esteemed and cultivated since the introduction of Oratorios by Handel, and has been executed with great excellence by performers of our own country, among whom Mr. Harrison was long a favorite, and justly; for he had one of the softest, most mellow tenor voices I ever heard, and a chaste style of singing: his only fault was want of energy and animation, which made his performance

rather dull and heavy. Mr. Bartleman, who is fresh in every one's recollection, was equally admired for his fine bass, or baritone, voice, and for his masterly manner of singing.

There is another species of composition more peculiarly our own, and which I should call our only national music; I mean our glees, which differ from any thing I ever heard, and in their style cannot be excelled. Their harmony is so full, rich, and melodious, when executed, as they have long been, by the Messrs. Knyvett, and the other performers accustomed to sing them together, that they completely gratify the ear, and he must be indeed fastidious, or greatly prejudiced, who cannot receive pleasure from their performance. I do not know of any female singer at present who has exclusively devoted herself to this kind of music, but there have been several; and none who do not keep solely to it can execute them with equal propriety. If the leading voice permits itself to wander from the strict melody of the air, in order to show graces or agility,

as is too frequently the case when singers accustomed to other styles are called in, the effect is injured instead of being improved, as the great beauty of those compositions is derived from the complete union and equality of all the voices, none preponderating, and from the simplicity of their execution. They then produce the effect of full chords struck on a finely toned organ.

But I have deviated widely from my chief purpose in entering at all upon this subject, which was to mention two great performers whom having once heard it is impossible not to remember, or, remembering, to pass over in silence. As my recollections extend to half a century, I am old enough to have heard, as amateurs, those most delightful singers of this, or of any other country, Mrs. Sheridan and Mrs. Bates, who as Miss Linley and Miss Harrop were at the top of their profession, which they both quitted on marrying, while in the prime of life, and at the height of their reputation. Mrs. Sheridan to an angelic face (of the peculiar expression of which those who never saw her may form

some idea from Sir Joshua Reynolds's beautiful portrait of her as Saint Cecilia) added an angelic voice, of so sweet and delightful a tone and quality that it went at once to the heart; and combined with her touching expression, produced an effect almost heavenly, and moved every hearer. I heard her more than once when I was very young, and the recollection has never been effaced.

Of Mrs. Bates I am much better able to speak, having frequently met her in private society, and heard her sing repeatedly. Her voice was perhaps not so *celestial* as Mrs. Sheridan's, but was nevertheless one of the finest quality; full, rich, and commanding, of great compass, flexibility, and power. In her youth she had learnt of Sacchini, and had she continued his scholar, would have become an excellent singer in the Italian school; but having attracted the admiration of Mr. Joah Bates, he took her from that master, and finished her musical education himself. He was not a professor of music, but most deeply skilled in its science, and a masterly player on the organ. His taste was

exclusively for Handel, and it was he who first imagined and arranged the marvellous performances in Westminster Abbey, which nobody but himself could have conducted to such perfection.* Of course he imparted his taste to Miss Harrop, and she from that time devoted herself almost wholly to Handel's music, in which she not only most excelled, but never was surpassed. I have however heard her sing in both styles, and execute extremely well fine theatrical songs of her first master's composition. I have also known her to go out upon a staircase, and there sing without accompaniment the simple ballad, "Shepherds, I have lost my love," making the whole house ring with the volume of her voice, which came over with a most beautiful and almost magical effect.

No subsequent singers have ever come up to these two, nor can any of the present day, however much they may be admired, be put

* It was a subject of regret that Mrs. Bates was not permitted to sing at them: great as Mara was, her performance would have been still finer.

into competition with them. Of all other English singers, Mrs. Billington alone was as good, but her voice was decidedly inferior to theirs, and her style so different, that she cannot fairly be compared with them, but must be reckoned more as an Italian than an English singer, and as such has received all the notice and praise to which she is justly entitled.

There is but one name more that I shall mention, and that very slightly; but when excellence in music is the subject, it cannot be omitted. It is that of the Misses Abrams, who were unrivalled in their line, and whose united voices formed the very perfection of harmony. But of them I shall not permit myself to speak; private friendship might make my praise appear too partial. I restrain myself with the less regret from saying what I feel, because their talents (still fresh in the remembrance of many) and their merits of every kind are too widely known to need my panegyric, and too universally acknow-

ledged to admit of the possibility of contradiction.*

* They have for many years quitted the profession, but still continued till lately to delight their friends in private; but I lament to add that Miss Abrams died two years ago. Her sister, Miss Theodosia (now Mrs. Garrow), and Miss Eliza, yet sing as well as when in the height of their practice, and Mrs. Garrow's beautiful contralto voice remains unimpaired: they live wholly in the country.

CONCLUSION.

I HERE conclude, and trust that in what I have written I have neither been unfair in my remarks on performers, nor totally wrong in my judgment on music in general, but that some at least of my criticisms on both may appear to be neither false nor unfounded. In the former it has been my object to give all praise where praise was due, and where it could not be conferred with justice to abstain as much as possible from censure by passing rapidly over those who could not otherwise have escaped it. In the latter I

am well aware that I shall seem prejudiced, and that my opinion will be widely different from that of all who admire the modern style, because they never heard a better. But if any old professors, or old amateurs like myself should ever see these pages, I cannot but flatter myself they would agree in most of what I have said, and join in opinion with me on the merits of those performers of whom my panegyric may appear exaggerated, but who so greatly excelled those of latter days that I cannot but remember them with delight, and speak of them with warmth.

I may perhaps be accused of presumption in entering into so much critical dissertation on the science, for which I am ill qualified, having no better ground on which to form a judgment than a tolerable ear, and long experience of hearing the best music while it was in its highest perfection. To this accusation I must plead guilty; nor was it my original intention to go so largely into such discussions. I undertook only to write *Reminiscences*, but was insensibly led away as I

proceeded, by the interest I felt in the subject. The writing of these pages has been at least an agreeable occupation to myself, and beguiled many hours of a long and tedious confinement, which has not only temporarily prevented my going to the theatre, but may in all probability disable me from ever returning to it; and I now close these remarks with little hope, and no great desire, of ever seeing another opera.

SUPPLEMENTARY SECTION

TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

Seasons of 1824, 5, and 6.

Colbrun—Catalani—Pasta—Caradori—Velluti—General Remarks and Retrospection.

SINCE the first edition of the foregoing pages was printed, three more Opera seasons have terminated, of which, being rather eventful, I subjoin an account.

That of 1824 produced an unusually large company of singers, no less than *six* prima donnas having performed during the course of it: namely, Madame Colbrun Rossini, Catalani, Ronzi di Begnis, Pasta, Vestris, and Caradori. The first of these, as Colbrun, was long esteemed the finest in Italy, both as singer and actress. She is now married to Rossini, with whom she came hither, both being engaged on high terms, she to sing, and he to compose; but both disappointed expectation. She is entirely *passée*, and her

powers are so diminished that she is unable to produce any effect on the stage, where she gave little satisfaction: but her taste was acknowledged to be excellent, and she was much admired in private concerts. She appeared in her husband's opera of Zelmira, which was not liked. It contains, as I was told, some of his *noisiest* pieces, of which I subsequently heard one at a concert; it was stunning. Rossini himself was so much engaged in pleasures and convivial meetings, as well as singing with great profit in private, that he neglected his engagement with the theatre, and did not complete the opera he was to have composed. He paid forfeit for his failure; but nevertheless he and his wife realized a large sum before they left the country.

Catalani, who had come to England on another journey of speculation, was not regularly engaged, but only paid for occasional appearances, and as her terms were more advantageous to herself than to the manager, and her attraction not great, they were very few. She did not perform any of her fine tragic characters, but acted, five or six times

only, her favorite comic opera Il fanatico per la musica, in which she introduced some new song every night. Her powers were said to be undiminished, her taste unimproved.

Ronzi retained her former favour; but even she was soon eclipsed by the arrival of Pasta, who had sung here before, as second woman, in the year Camporese first came to England. She was then a young and promising singer, but, though very pleasing, was little noticed. This was fortunate for her, as here she might have remained in mediocrity; but returning to Italy she has there so improved as to have become a capital performer, and is now at the very head of her profession. She will be spoken of more at large hereafter.

The other two above named are but second-rate prima, though first-rate seconda donnas. The versatility of Madame Vestris's talent is well known, fitting her equally for the Italian, French, and English stage. Her first theatrical appearance was in Grassini's part of Proserpina, which she acted in two successive seasons with Sessi, and with

Fodor. She then gave promise of higher excellence than she has attained, but still she must be allowed to be a pleasing singer, and a very good actress. Caradori is a *nom de théatre*; this amiable and interesting young lady is of a good German family; her name was Mademoiselle Munk, and now is Mrs. Allan; but she retains, and is better known by her theatrical appellation. I shall shortly speak more of her.* The male singers of this year were nearly the same as in the two preceding.

With all this collection of talent, the season failed; nor could it well be otherwise from the enormous expense of so unnecessarily numerous a company; but other causes contributed to its bad success. Soon after its termination all the contents of the Opera-

* It may be observed as an odd coincidence that Pasta, Vestris, and Caradori all have acted the Page in Le nozze di Figaro, and none more successfully than the last, who by accident, not choice, made her début in that part; and it proved fortunate for her, as her charming manner of performing it laid the foundation of her subsequent favour.

house were advertised for sale, and it appeared probable it had closed to open no more. Interminable disputes and litigation, mismanagement, and repeated losses seemed to threaten ruin to whomsoever should be bold enough to undertake it; but by some arrangement the sale never took place, and the same manager ventured to run the hazard of renewing his lease.

If the last season ended unsuccessfully, that of 1825 began in no very auspicious manner; for when the theatre was about to open, an alarm was raised that the house was insecure from one of the main walls having given way. The license was immediately suspended till it should be examined, and substantially repaired so as to remove every suspicion of danger. For this purpose it was found necessary to pull down and rebuild the wall of one end, a work which was immediately commenced. The manager engaged temporarily the New Theatre Royal in the Haymarket, which, though much larger than that where the Opera had twice taken refuge, was nevertheless much too small to accom-

modate the subscribers, and receive such audiences as could afford any hope of profit to the concern, for which a company had been provided proportionate to the large theatre. Comic operas were chiefly acted there, in which Ronzi and Vestris were the principal performers. Under these disadvantages passed a great part of the season with very moderate success.

At length the King's Theatre having been repaired with incredible celerity, the Opera removed *home*, and shortly after the great favorite Pasta arrived for a limited number of nights. During her stay the theatre prospered exceedingly, crowded audiences attending it whenever she performed. About the same time Ronzi fell ill, and totally lost her voice, so that she was obliged to throw up her engagement and return to Italy. Madame Vestris too having seceded from the Opera to confine herself entirely to the English stage, where she is so deservedly a favorite, and Caradori unable for some time to perform, it became necessary, in order to repair these losses, to engage a young singer, the

daughter of the tenor Garcia, who had sung here for several seasons. She was as yet a mere girl, and had never appeared on any public stage: but from the first moment of her appearance she showed evident talents for it both as singer and actress. Her extreme youth, her prettiness, her pleasing voice, and sprightly easy action as Rosina in the Barbiere di Seviglia, in which part she made her début, gained her general favour; but she was too highly extolled, and injudiciously put forward as a prima donna, when she was only a very promising débûtante, who in time, by study and practice, would in all probability, under the tuition of her father, a good musician, but (to my ears at least) a most disagreeable singer, rise to eminence in her profession. But in the following year she went with her whole family (all of whom, old and young, are singers *tant bons que mauvais*) to establish an Italian opera in America, where, it is said, she is married, so that she will probably never return to this country, if to Europe.

I have now to record an event which

excited great curiosity in the musical world, and for a time was of considerable advantage to the theatre, closing its season with great éclat. This was the arrival of a male *soprano* singer, the only one left on the Italian stage, who has for many years, perhaps only from having no rival in his line, been looked upon as the best singer of his country. He came to this with strong and numerous recommendations, but under no engagement for the Opera, and he had been here some time before the manager dared to produce so novel and extraordinary a performer. No singer of this description had appeared here for a quarter of a century, so that the greater part of those who formerly were delighted with Pacchierotti, Marchesi, &c. were now no more, and a generation had sprung up who had never heard a voice of the sort, and were strongly prejudiced against it. His first reception at concerts was far from favorable, the scurrilous abuse lavished upon him before he was heard, cruel and illiberal: and it was not till after long deliberation, much persuasion, and assurances of support, that the

manager ventured to engage him for the remainder of the season. Even then, such was the popular prejudice and general cry raised against him, that unusual precautions were deemed necessary to secure a somewhat partial audience, and prevent his being driven from the stage on his very first entry upon it, which seemed to be a pre-determined measure. At length, the first appearance of Signor Velluti was announced to take place, on an unusual night, *for his own benefit*, granted him, it was said, on account of the great trouble he had taken, (to use a theatrical phrase) in *getting up* the new opera; which indeed was true, for, as he had a perfect knowledge of the stage, he entirely directed all the performances in which he took a part. As he had brought me a letter of introduction from a friend at Florence, and my curiosity was a good deal raised from the representation given to me of his talents, I was induced once more to enter a theatre, and was present on that occasion. At the moment when he was expected to appear, the most profound silence reigned in one of

the most crowded audiences I ever saw, broken on his advancing by loud applauses of encouragement. The first note he uttered gave a shock of surprize, almost of disgust, to inexperienced ears, but his performance was listened to with attention and great applause throughout, with but few *audible* expressions of disapprobation speedily suppressed. The opera he had chosen for his début was Il Crociato in Egitto, by a German composer named Mayerbeer, till then totally unknown in this country. The music was quite of the new school, but not copied from its founder Rossini: it was original, odd, flighty, and might even be termed *fantastic*, but at times beautiful; here and there most delightful melodies and harmonies occurred, but it was unequal. Solos were as rare as in all the modern operas, but the numerous concerted pieces much shorter and far less noisy than Rossini's, consisting chiefly of duetts and terzettos with but few chorusses, and no overwhelming accompaniments. Indeed Mayerbeer has rather gone into the contrary extreme, the instrumental parts

being frequently so slight as to be almost meagre, while he has sought to produce new and striking effects from the voices alone. The first woman's part was filled by Caradori, the only singer left who could undertake it, Pasta's engagement having terminated, and her performance gave great satisfaction. Though from want of power she is not to be ranked in the first line of prima donnas, it may truly be said she is *without a fault.* Her voice is sweet, but not strong, her knowledge of music very great, her taste and style excellent, full of delicacy and expression. In a room she is a perfect singer. Her genteel and particularly modest manner, combined with a very agreeable person and countenance, render her a pleasing and interesting, though not a surprizing performer. The young Garcia also appeared to advantage in this opera.

To speak more minutely of Velluti. This singer is no longer young, and his voice is in decay. It seems to have had considerable compass, but has failed (which is extraordinary) in its middle tones, many of which

are harsh and grating to the ear. Some of his upper notes are still exquisitely sweet, and he frequently dwell on, swells, and diminishes them with delightful effect. His lower notes too are full and mellow, and he displays considerable art in descending from the one to the other by passages ingeniously contrived to avoid those which he knows to be defective. His manner is florid without extravagance, his embellishments (many of which were new to me) tasteful and neatly executed. His general style is the *grazioso*, with infinite delicacy and a great deal of expression, but never rising to the grand, simple, and dignified *cantabile* of the old school, still less to the least approach towards the *bravura*. He evidently has no other, therefore there is a great want of variety in his performance, as well as a total deficiency of force and spirit. Of the great singers mentioned before, he most resembles Pacchierotti, in one only, and that the lowest of his styles, but cannot be compared to him in excellence. He is also somewhat like him in figure, but far better looking; in his youth

he was reckoned remarkably handsome. On the whole, there is much to approve and admire in his performance, and I can readily believe that in his prime he was not unworthy of the reputation he has attained in Italy. Even here, under so many disadvantages, he produced considerable effect, and overcame much of the prejudice raised against him. To the old he brought back some pleasing recollections; others, to whom his voice was new, became reconciled to it, and sensible of his merits, whilst many declared that to the last his tones gave them more pain than pleasure. However, either from curiosity or real admiration, he drew crowded audiences, and no opera but the Crociato was performed to the end of the season.

The next (of 1826) began also with the same opera, but very differently performed. Garadori, though still belonging to the company, was unaccountably removed for the purpose of introducing a new singer of the name of Bonini, and Garcia's place was filled by a performer below mediocrity. The

new, first woman having frequently sung with, and been taught by Velluti, was brought over at his recommendation and desire. She was not without merit, and it was not easy to say what were her faults; but it was impossible she should please: neither her voice nor her style had any peculiar excellence or defects; her person was small and very plain; and she was no actress. She was little attended to, and though never calling down disapprobation, was never applauded. Velluti's favour sensibly declined, and in his second opera called Tebaldo e Isolina, by Morlacchi, which he considers as his chef-d'œuvre, he was much less admired than in the former. For his benefit this year, (which I also went to) he brought out Aureliano in Palmira, one of the first compositions of Rossini, and the only one of his operas in which he ever would sing. It is in my opinion one of the best of that master, as he had not yet, in his efforts at originality, fallen into that wild unnatural style which characterizes so many of his works. There are in it many beautiful melodies, and but

little of the extravagant ornament and cramped passages he subsequently delighted to introduce. Those who are more conversant with his compositions, and can remember them (which I have professed I cannot) say that this opera has been a nursery from whence he has drawn much for his later productions, and that there is scarcely one good motivo in it which he has not transplanted into some other. The first woman's part was again filled by Bonini, a miserable representative of the heroic Zenobia. But I now discovered why Velluti preferred her to any other performer. Pasta had returned to England some time before for her usual short engagement, but they never appeared in the same opera. This was thought to be occasioned by jealousy or rivalry in one or both: Velluti however was in the right to decline it. She would not only have overpowered him with the strength and volume of her voice, but her style was so different, often so superior to his own, that they could never have harmonized well: whereas Bonini, trained by him, accustomed to sing with him,

and having acquired all his peculiar graces, was exactly suited to him by equality of power, and similarity of style: in the duettos accordingly nothing could be more perfect than the union of their voices.

I was enabled to form this judgment and comparison by having, at an earlier period of the season been present at Pasta's benefit, and witnessed her performance of Mayer's celebrated opera of Medea. Having heard her once before at a private concert, with, I own, less pleasure than I had anticipated, I had much curiosity to see her on the stage, and there she fully answered my highest expectations. In a small room her voice was too loud and sometimes harsh, her manner too forcible and vehement:* but in the

* It may here be remarked that the modern music spoils the singers for concerts, especially in private houses. The constantly singing concerted pieces, adapted only for the theatre, gives them the habit of so forcing their voices that they know not how to moderate them to the small space of an ordinary room. Neither are noisy finales and such like pieces suited to the place or agreeable without the orchestra and without action. The ear is often absolutely pained by their loudness. Add

theatre all blemishes disappeared: she is really a first-rate performer both as singer and actress, and that by mere dint of talent without any very pre-eminent natural qualifications: for, though a pretty woman, her figure is short and not graceful; and her voice, though powerful and extensive, is not of the very finest quality, nor free from defects. No part could be more calculated to display her powers than that of Medea, which affords opportunities for the deepest pathos, and the most energetic passion. In both she was eminently successful, and her performance both surprized and delighted me. None since Banti's had equalled it, and perhaps she even excelled her great predecessor as an actress, though in quality and

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to this, that few singers can venture upon pieces so difficult and intricate without having practised them together: so that the frequenters of the opera hear again in concerts only the same music they are perhaps satiated with at the theatre. How different this from the time when Pacchierotti, Mara, &c. could charm with an endless variety of the most beautiful songs, as well as by the delicacy of their execution of them.

sweetness of voice she infinitely falls short o her. It would be unfair not to add that th whole opera was well performed. Caradori acted and sung charmingly the tender, gentl part of Creusa, and Curioni was animate and effective in that of Jason. Even th second tenor, Torri, who possesses a ver sweet, but feeble voice, filled very creditabl the part assigned to him. He has muc taste, and is a pleasing singer in a room.

Pasta's other principal characters are tha of Romeo, of Zingarelli, Semiramide, c Rossini, and Tancredi, all of which she said to perform admirably. In the last, h manner of singing Di tanti palpiti is muc better than that of any other performer the part: she sings it much slower, thereb doing away, in a great degree, with it *country-dance-like* character.* She has als

* This seems to be the more proper as the motivo i taken from a Latin Litany which Rossini has not scrupled to adopt as his own: his other favorite cavatina, Di piacer mi balza il core, is a wild air sung by the Sicilia peasants: so much for the *originality* of his two mos popular songs.

appeared in Paesiello's Nina, but in that is reported to have failed, making the character rather imbecile than insane. The opera too was mangled and curtailed into one act, and even so thought too long and tiresome, so entirely has taste changed, and the music of one of the most delightful of all Italian masters gone out of fashion.

At the end of the season Pasta and Velluti both left England; the former with pressing invitations to return, the latter probably never to be again engaged at our Opera.

Another season has now commenced, ushered in by the announcement of a most numerous company; but of the long list, comprehending names of great note, few have yet appeared, and it is to be apprehended many never will, a great part of them having other engagements on the continent, and scarcely any being engaged for the whole season. In fact, there is *no* complete established company, a new and most injudicious custom having prevailed of late years of dividing the season into portions, one performer coming for the early, another

for the latter part of it; some for three months, others for still shorter periods; so that the public may be deprived of their greatest favorite, and of the most admired operas, in the height of their popularity, and others substituted not so well approved. If this be unfair to the audiences, it is no less injurious to the manager, who thereby is not only kept in uncertainty, and may, by a non-arrival, be left without any singers at all, but incurs a great additional unnecessary expence. He announces six or seven prima donnas, of whom the principal demand nearly as large a salary for a short period as for a season, and the rest are to be paid no inconsiderable sums without the least benefit to the theatre. Two female singers of the first class, a serious and a buffa, are all that are necessary, with a secondary capable of taking a leading part, or acting as substitute if required. More are positively an evil, and only embarrass the concern. It is impossible to employ them all advantageously, each will want to have her own opera, there being very few indeed in which there are two principal female cha-

racters; and from their contending claims, difficulties, disputes, and cabals inevitably arise. Whilst enormous expence is thus lavished in superfluities, a mean economy prevails in all the inferior departments, with regard to secondary singers, the chorus and orchestra: the scenery, decorations and wardrobe, are in every respect unworthy of the largest theatre in the country. The ballets too have latterly been of a very inferior description, scarcely above mediocrity. Such are the consequences of a bad system of government, and of the want of a manager conversant with the Italian stage, a good judge of music and of singers, acquainted with foreign languages, and foreign usages, of liberal ideas, not sparing of expence, but judicious in the application of it; knowing what is right, and firm in exercising his authority to enforce it: in short, one who can act for himself, and not be dependent on the ignorance or bad faith of subordinate agents. Such a one only can carry on the business of the theatre with success, and give to the English public a really good Italian opera.

While such is the mismanagement of affairs behind the curtain, those before it are on a no less improper footing. This will clearly appear from a comparison of what the opera formerly was with what it is now. It will scarcely be credited by those who are not old enough to remember it, that at the period when these Reminiscences commence, and for many years subsequent to it, the price of a subscription to a box for *fifty* representations was *twenty guineas* a seat, so that there was a positive saving of five guineas on the season to every subscriber; and that too when the theatre was differently constructed, and the private boxes were very few in number, not exceeding in all *thirty-six*, eighteen, ranged in three rows, on each side of the house;* the front being then occupied

* The boxes were then much larger and more commodious than they are now, and could contain with ease more than their allotted number of subscribers: far different from the miserable *pigeon-holes* of the present theatre, into which six persons can hardly be squeezed, of whom, in most situations, two thirds can never see the stage.

by open public boxes (or *amphithéatre* as it is called in French theatres) communicating with the pit. Both of these were filled exclusively with the highest classes of Society, all, without exception, in the full dress then universally worn. The audiences thus assembled were considered as indisputably presenting a finer spectacle than any other theatre in Europe, and absolutely astonished the foreign performers to whom such a sight was entirely new. At the end of the performance the company of the pit and boxes repaired to the coffee-room, which was then the best assembly in London, private ones being rarely given on opera nights, and all the first society was regularly to be seen there. Over the front box was the five shilling gallery, then resorted to by respectable persons not in full dress: and above that an upper gallery to which the admission was three shillings. Subsequently the house was encircled by private boxes, yet still the prices remained the same, and the pit preserved its respectability and even grandeur till the old house was burnt down in 1789. After its

rebuilding the subscription was raised to twenty-five guineas, and subsequently to thirty, but then the number of representations was encreased to sixty, so that, the admission never exceeded the usual pit price of half a guinea. Thus it continued the whole time that I was a subscriber to the opera. It was not till the second year of Catalani's engagement, when she more than doubled her demands, and obtained a salary wholly unprecedented, that the subscription for a whole box was at once raised from *one hundred and eighty* to *three hundred guineas.** Thus has she permanently injured the establishment: for the price, once raised, has never been lowered, or at most in a very trifling degree: and it is become quite impossible for persons of moderate incomes to afford so unreasonable a sum for a mere entertainment. Hence has arisen the custom

* In her first year Catalani had the same salary as Mrs. Billington, 2000 guineas, (500 more than was paid to Banti.) I heard her say that price was *ridiculously* low, and that to retain her, "*ci vogliono molte mila lire sterline.*" She demanded, and obtained *five thousand.*

of halving and sub-dividing the subscriptions, so that very few persons have now the sole ownership of a box. Hence too that of letting them for the night, and of selling even single tickets when not used by the proprietor. The evil of this practice is evident. Formerly every lady possessing an opera box considered it as much her *home* as her house, and was as sure to be found there, few missing any of the performances. If prevented from going, the *loan* of her box, and the gratuitous use of the tickets was a favour always cheerfully offered and thankfully received as a matter of course, without any idea of payment. Then too it was a favour to ask gentlemen to belong to a box, when subscribing to one was actually advantageous. Now, no lady can propose to them to give her more than double the price of the admission at the door, so that having paid so exorbitantly, every one is glad to be reimbursed a part at least of the great expence which she must often support alone. Boxes and tickets therefore are no longer given, they are let for what can be got; for which traffic

the circulating libraries afford an easy accommodation. Many too which are not taken for the season are disposed of in the same manner, and are almost put up to auction, their price varying from three to eight or even ten guineas, according to the performance of the evening, and other accidental circumstances.* I have known an instance of a box being asked for in the morning for a particular opera, but not taken on account of the high price demanded: in the afternoon of the same day the same box was offered for half the sum, and then again rejected from the suspicious appearance of the tender. The next morning the reason was discovered; *the opera had been changed.* This artifice requires no comment. In no other theatre in any country was such uncertainty of prices ever heard of: they every

* Even the performers who have benefits now advertise what sum they will *condescend* to take for the boxes in each tier. The invariable rule formerly was half a guinea each person: they could demand no more: all beyond that sum was a gratuity, generally given to favorite performers.

where are, and ought to be, fixed and invariable.

While the boxes are thus let at prices so much too high, admissions to the pit are to be purchased beneath their proper value. Half a guinea has at all times been the established price for that part of the house: but by the convenient accommodation before alluded to they are now to be bought for inferior sums nightly, and if taken for the whole season, for not much more than half what it would cost to pay the entrance money at the door. This is as injurious and unfair to the proprietors of the theatre as the box system is to the frequenters of it. Besides these contrivances for filling the theatre the manager has recourse to issuing orders of free admission (varying in number according to circumstances) that the benches may be occupied on unattractive nights: boxes even are frequently given away, or let for trifling sums, to create the delusive appearance of a crowded house, when in fact the money actually received is barely sufficient to cover the evening's expence.

From all these causes the whole style of the Opera House is totally changed, its audiences are of a different description, its comfort entirely lost. The pit has long ceased to be the resort of ladies of fashion, and latterly, by the innovations introduced, is no longer agreeable to the former male frequenters of it. Those who compose the best part of the audience, and who really pay the fair price, coming late to the theatre, find all the seats occupied by the holders of orders and of cheap admissions, while the boxes, being frequently filled by occasional hirers of them, afford no retreat to those who would visit the friends to whom they properly belong.* This is an abuse which the manager should rectif for his own sake; for that of the subscribers the rent of the boxes ought to be lowered, if not to their original price, which may now be impossible, at least to one

* Most improper company is sometimes to be seen even in the principal tiers, and tickets bearing the names of ladies of the highest class have been presented by those of the *lowest*, such as used to be admitted only to the hindmost rows of the gallery.

far beneath what is still demanded, thoug
the first cause for raising it has long ceasec
This might be done, if the establishmer
were judiciously managed, and its expence
reduced within reasonable bounds; especiall
as the term of all the boxes which were pr
vate property, (originally assigned to th
lenders of money for rebuilding the theatre
is now expired, and they are become that c
the manager, by which a very large additio
is made to the amount of the subscriptio
The only plea that can be adduced for n
doing so, must be, the pecuniary embarras
ments in which former managers hav
plunged the concern, the vast debt yet ur
paid, and the endless law suits in which i
affairs are still involved. To these difficulti
it is almost hopeless to expect that an effec
tual remedy will be found, or that the en
cumbrances will ever be entirely shaken o
Certainly not as the concern is at prese
conducted. The whole system is radical
bad; and nothing can restore the Opera
this country to its former respectable a
agreeable footing, or the performances to th

excellence which a public paying so dearly has a right to expect, but a total reformation, an entire change of proprietors, of managers, of all parties connected with the theatre, I had almost said, hampered and embarrassed as it is, of the theatre itself.

POSTSCRIPT.

The anticipation expressed above of an ill-ordered and mismanaged season has already been fully realized, though it is not yet half over. Caradori opened it, but was soon superceded by a Miss Fanny Ayton, who in her turn has yielded to a Signora Giacinta Toso. The former of these, a young English woman who has acted in Italy, is said to have some merit, but an indifferent voice: the second has the recommendation not only of a brilliant voice, but of extraordinary beauty: but this is her first appearance on any stage, and she is extremely young; consequently she cannot yet be a finished prima donna, whatever promise of future excellence she may hold out. There is too a Signora

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